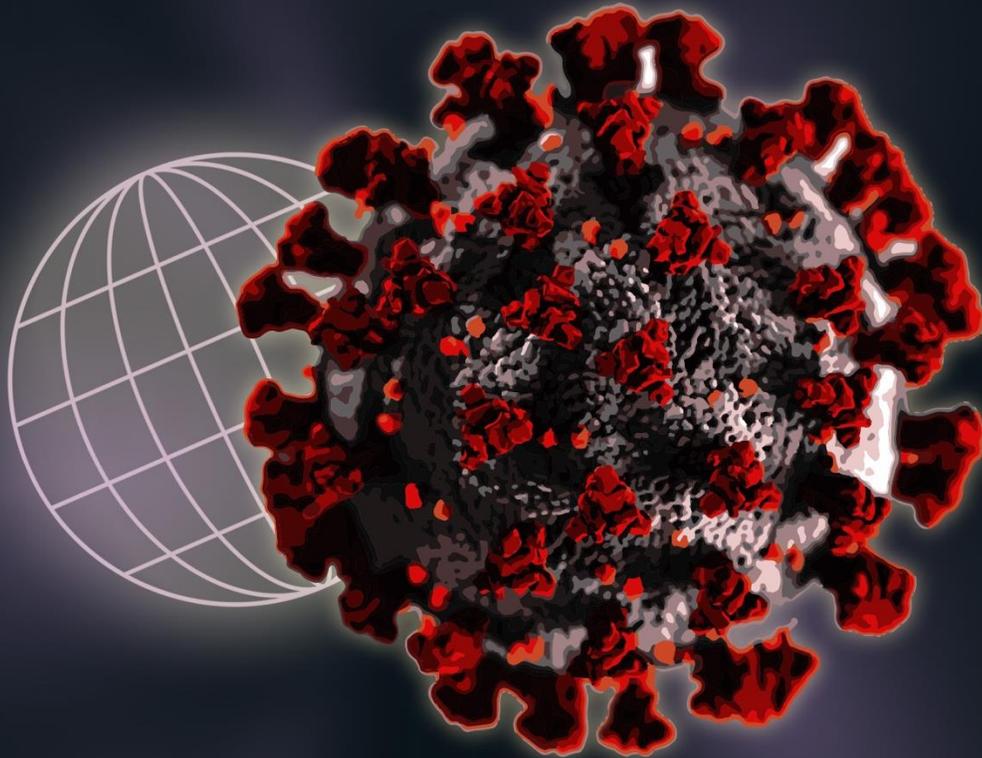


COVID-19

UNDER DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY



ROLAND RICH (EDITOR)

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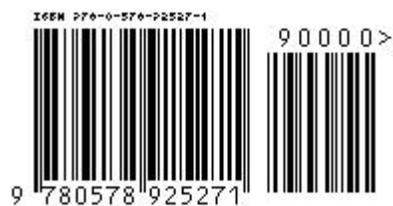
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Chapter 1

A PROJECT IS BORN

Roland Rich

May 31, 2021

We lived through the pandemic. As I looked at my students on the screen, I knew we had this in common. Some had suffered more than others, but here we all were facing a new semester together, their final semester. Should we carry on in business-as-usual mode? Or should we acknowledge this insistent reality?

I had already retired twice, once from the Australian foreign service and once from the United Nations secretariat, when I began a new career as a professor in the recently launched United Nations and Global Policy Studies Master's Program (UNMA) in the Political Science Department at Rutgers University (New Brunswick). I had developed two courses, one on problems of democratic consolidation and one on economic development in the global South, when the then Director, Professor Eric Davis, asked me to develop the Capstone syllabus which would be the required finishing course for our students. I was surprised by this assignment, but perhaps Professor Davis somehow saw my inexperience and naïveté as virtues.

My investigation of other courses tended to divide the capstone syllabi into three types. One type, far more common in the hard sciences, was as an extension of the professor's research whereby the students would conduct experiments and undertake research as a contribution to the seminal question the professor was tackling. The other two types can be described as deepening or broadening syllabi. The deepening syllabi

drilled down on an important topic or theory, while the broadening syllabi tried to cover a broad range of issues. I ended up borrowing from all three concepts. The syllabus would cover many of the issues dealt with in the program allowing students to fill gaps in their knowledge and review areas of interest. The assignments would, however, allow students to drill down on questions of particular interest to them. The students would, in consultation with the professor, select the issues they wished to cover in depth in the three individual assignments: a policy brief, a review essay and an academic lecture. And the course would have a faint underlying question, of research interest to the professor, which would pop up at various points. The underlying question was: Does Democracy Matter?

I had taught the capstone course for five Spring semesters, improving and refining it, but sticking to the original structure. The students responded well and the best review essays from the course invariably won the annual UNMA essay contest. But as the Spring 2021 semester arrived, the question posed in the opening paragraph came into sharp focus. Was it business as usual, or should we try something different? I would let the students decide.

The first major written assignment for the course was a chapter-length policy brief on a topic of their choosing accepted by the professor. The choice was whether to continue with that assignment or change it to something more focused and communal. My suggestion was that each student would write a chapter-length study of Covid-19 in one country under the general heading *Covid-19 Under Democracy and Autocracy*. I dangled, as an incentive, the possibility that, depending on the quality of the assignments, we could put them together as chapters and publish an e-book. I directed the students to a wonderful website from the University of Melbourne which had been aggregating academic and journalistic studies of the pandemic from around the world – <https://www.democratic-decay.org/> – so that they could make an informed choice. I

noted, mimicking good UN practice, that we would need a consensus of all the students to adopt this approach. The following week, that consensus crystallized. Indeed, in UN-speak, the proposal was adopted by acclamation.

Of the various approaches to studying a pandemic, being a political science class, the chosen approach was to ask how the pandemic was handled in democracies and autocracies. This question presented itself starkly from the very first months when China dealt successfully with community transmission through a sudden, rigid, and toughly-enforced shut down. Democratic nations like Italy and Spain were unable to replicate this feat. Government type was therefore a starting point for the enquiry, but it would not hold a monopoly on that enquiry. The students were asked to determine whether there were other features, historical, geographic, or social, that contributed to understanding how nations dealt with the pandemic.

The next stage was to select the countries to be reviewed by the ten students in the capstone class. I put forward a small sample to gauge interest. The sample had a mix of government types and geographic representation. One constraint was access to information. Iran, for example, was clearly an interesting country given its early experience of the virus. But it was not clear that trustworthy information could be obtained. No-one in the class had Farsi language skills and the information available in English was likely to be tainted by propaganda and spin from all sides.

It was at this stage that I reluctantly took the decision to exclude China and the United States from the study. They are critical countries to any study of the pandemic, but they represented particular difficulties in our case. It seemed impossible to do either country justice in a chapter-length analysis. The burden on the student to distill and summarize would be too onerous, and the task risked triggering a process of essentializing certain features of each country's government and society. There was another problem, which initially seems contradictory. The story of how each country

dealt with the pandemic had been broadly covered by the media and the commentariat because the issue had become deeply political in each country. In the US, it turned the November 2020 election into a referendum on President Trump's incompetent handling of the pandemic. In China, it was grist to the propaganda mill demonstrating the competence of the Communist Party where any commentary on President Xi Jinping in less than hagiographic terms was deemed suspicious. I was reluctant to send any student into this morass.

We ended up with three countries from Europe – Germany from the European Union, the UK that had quit the EU, and Russia. There were two from Asia – Taiwan and Vietnam; two from Africa – South Africa and Uganda; and two from Latin America – Brazil and Cuba. And in view of their success in handling the pandemic it seemed worthwhile to examine the situation in Australia or New Zealand. Australia was chosen because of the greater complexity of the issues there, including its federal governance structure. The geographic balance was matched by the regime type balance with six democracies and four autocracies. There are four federal states among the ten and two single-party states which might be considered to be three if one includes Russia. Perhaps most important to the balance, there were five states which had been ostensibly successful in dealing with the virus and five that had not.

While the project had an underlying theme and the subject matter was well focused, the chapters remain individual works of scholarship. The interests and personalities of the authors shine through. This is only to be expected. Students are not algorithms! They each bring with them their individual set of perspectives, approaches, and idealistic expectations. Accordingly, the chapters remain comparable while investigating different aspects of the problem. One chapter may focus on federalism while another on indigenous rights. There are Africanist and East Asian perspectives. And one of the authors tackles the subject with a libertarian approach.

A brief explanation about the process of bringing this publication into being may be in order. As noted, it was an assignment attracting a grade that would articulate into a final grade for the course. The due date for the assignment was March 12. At the outset, I insisted that a publication is only possible if the quality of the work justifies it. It would not be peer reviewed, but it would be grade reviewed. The assignment would need to attract an A to qualify for the next phase. Eight of the ten assignments so qualified. Again, at the outset I explained that those assignments that did not gain an A, would retain the assigned grade but could nevertheless qualify for publication with revision. As is my wont, each student was given extensive comments on their assignment. I explain at the outset of every course that my job is to be a professional critic of their work. I will note the positives, but it will be of greater benefit to the students for me to point out the negatives...those areas that need improvement. The second phase of the project was to resubmit the assignment taking into account the critical comments and providing another coat of polish. I would then change my job from professor to editor and return the second draft with suggestions in track changes. The third version would, hopefully, be the final.

From the outset, we all knew that there was a logical fallacy in our undertaking. We were analyzing an event that had not completed its trajectory. We did not know how much longer the emergency would last. We could only guess at how it would all end. We had no benefit of hindsight. Historians continue to draw new conclusions about the impact of plagues and pandemics centuries after the event. Yet we are writing about the subject in the heat of the moment. The reader should therefore view this work not as a comprehensive account of the Covid-19 pandemic, but as a snapshot of how governments managed this particular black swan.

Chapter 2

AUSTRALIA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE:**THE ACHILLES' HEEL****Shahinaz Abdelhamid****The arrival of the virus and the Commonwealth response**

In late 2019, the emergence of a respiratory illness soon to be known as Covid-19 or the 'Coronavirus' coming out of Wuhan, China in the Hubei province raised concern across the globe. The pathogen was soon classified by the World Health Organization as a viral pneumonia whose effects were unknown to the world. The spread of Covid-19 happened faster than the world could prepare for, as the past few decades have created an environment of globalization that interconnected nations through intensive travel. Australia's response to the looming pandemic was swifter than most due to its geographical location. It quickly added Covid-19 as a listed human disease in January of 2020 under its Biosecurity Act of 2015, an act that deals with enhancing border measures to manage biological threats that can have serious impacts on plant, animal, and human health.

This rapid response was not a common practice by many nations across the world. For Australia, measures were quickly put into practice as border security staff began meeting with passengers from direct flights from Wuhan to Sydney to identify possible cases of

Covid-19. These individuals were identified, asked if they were symptomatic and advised to follow up with health officials should they suspect they have Covid.¹

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) began the process of issuing travel advice in January of 2020 and raised a level three warning for Wuhan asking Australians to reconsider travel. While there was no identification of Covid-19 cases at this stage, Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy acknowledged that the limited level of knowledge surrounding the virus noting that incubation may be occurring undetected. That same day on January 23, Flight MU749 was the last flight from Wuhan to Sydney and the next day DFAT increased its travel warning to a level four, advising Australians not to travel to Wuhan or the Hubei Province. On January 25, the first identified Covid-19 case was a man traveling from Wuhan via flight C2321 from Guangzhou to Melbourne which arrived on January 19. He was placed under isolation. News broke that there were three more cases of men who had arrived around the same time. The federal government communicated the information to the Victorian and New South Wales authorities prompting them to contact passengers from those flights to inform them of the risk of transmission. At the time, Murphy stated that Covid-positive people may not be infectious until they are symptomatic, but vigilance should be practiced. As cases continued to rise, Murphy maintained that there was not yet evidence of human-to-human transmission outside China so there was no reason to quarantine passengers. However, children who were exposed were advised to stay home for two weeks. Given the increasing gravity of the situation, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that there were plans to send consular officials to Hubei to aid stranded Australians.²

Global efforts to contain this virus were clearly not effective as cases outside Hubei Province began to increase sharply. DFAT responded to this development on January 28 by issuing another travel warning for Australians to reconsider their travel to all

¹ Paul Karp, "Timeline: How Australia Responded to the Coronavirus Outbreak." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, February 3, 2020, www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/03/timeline-how-australia-responded-to-the-coronavirus-outbreak.

² *Ibid.*

destinations in China. On January 29, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) announced that cases of Covid-19 present as asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic, an ailment that may be mistaken for any other sickness making this virus particularly dangerous when it comes to transmission. Murphy now stated that the evidence suggests that transmission may be possible during the pre-symptomatic period. The AHPPC encouraged high caution and self-isolation for 14 days for contacts of those confirmed to have Covid-19 as well as all travelers returning from Hubei. All Australian State and Territory governments heeded the same precautions for their citizens and Queensland applied the AHPPC advice to all travelers from China. In preparation for the increased interaction between health care workers and Covid patients, the Australian government released one million masks from its stockpile to be used as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers and those who had relevant travel history and symptoms. The general public was excluded from this measure at the time.³

On January 31, the World Health Organization finally declared that Covid-19 is a public health emergency of international concern, a call that had little relevance for Australia as the nation had begun responding to the threat weeks before. Australia's Health Minister Greg Hunt confirmed the 9th case in the country. On February 1, the Australian government announced that all foreign arrivals from China will not be permitted to enter Australia except for Australian citizens, permanent residents, immediate family members, legal guardians, and spouses. Another travel warning was raised, a level four, recommending that no Australians travel to China and those who do must isolate for 14 days in a third country before returning to Australia. This move by the Australian government prompted neighboring New Zealand and eight other countries to follow by closing their borders to any foreign arrivals from China in response

³ *Ibid.*

to the thousands of cases and hundreds of deaths reported in that country. The situation was becoming especially concerning due to the virus's mortality rate.⁴

Delayed responses to the virus around the globe and continued travel between nations through flights and cruise ships rapidly increased the spread of Covid-19 in Australia in February 2020. Travel from China was no longer the only concern as international travel fueled the transmission across multiple nations. New travel warnings were implemented by the Australian government for Iran, another major Covid-19 hotspot, requiring travelers to quarantine in a third country prior to entering Australia.⁵ On February 27, as Covid began to spread in the nation, Morrison activated the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan, a guide to dealing with the new threat of Covid-19.⁶ This guide would act as a cohesion mechanism to unify the federal government and individual state and territory responses to strengthen the effectiveness of the response and eradicate the threat.

The first wave: March to April

The impact of the virus began hitting Australia in March of 2020. Within the first week, Australia reported its first two deaths. Both victims were over the age of 65, one of whom had disembarked from the Diamond Princess,⁷ a cruise ship that docked in Australia in February, and the other was a woman in an aged care facility.⁸ Later that week, Victorian Health Minister Jenny Mikakos revealed that a doctor in Victoria who had just returned from the US tested positive for Covid-19 but not before interacting with

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Dan Conifer, "Australia Announces Iran Travel Ban amid Coronavirus Outbreak." *ABC News*, ABC News, February 29, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-29/australia-announces-iran-travel-ban/12013884.

⁶ Brett Worthington, "Morrison Extends China Travel Ban as He Enacts Coronavirus Emergency Plan." *ABC News*, ABC News, February 27, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-27/federal-government-coronavirus-pandemic-emergency-plan/12005734.

⁷ Elizabeth Daoud, "WA Man Becomes First Australian to Die from Coronavirus." *7NEWS.Com.au*, 7NEWS.Com.au, March 1, 2020, 7news.com.au/travel/coronavirus/western-australian-man-becomes-first-person-in-australia-to-die-from-coronavirus-c-723547.

⁸ Esther Han, "First Coronavirus Death Confirmed in NSW as Infections Increase." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, The Sydney Morning Herald, March 4, 2020, www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/first-coronavirus-death-confirmed-in-nsw-as-infections-increase-20200304-p546z6.html.

70 patients at the Toorak Clinic in Melbourne. Contact tracing efforts prompted the closure of the clinic and the notification of all patients who interacted with the doctor as well as passengers from his return flight.⁹ One of the passengers, a teacher from a school in Melbourne, later tested positive causing the school to shut down.¹⁰ As the virus closed in on Australia, cancellations of public gatherings and the shutdown of schools and offices increased. Tasmania's David Walsh canceled the annual Museum of Old and New Art Winter Festival, a great source of revenue for the island state that heavily relies on tourism. This move signaled the understanding that the nation would spare no cost in its pandemic response.

While all cases so far were related to foreign travel, the first confirmed case of community transmission believed to be a result of domestic travel was reported in the Australian Capital Territory on March 12. A decision to create a coalition among the Commonwealth government and the Premiers of the Australian states and territories was made on March 13 with the creation of the National Cabinet. This entity would serve as a cohesive, data driven agency that would make decisions on pandemic response with the support of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPCC), the Commonwealth's Chief Medical Officer and the individual Premiers. To mediate the economic damage caused by Covid-19 in Australia, the first stimulus package introduced by the Prime Minister aimed at strengthening the health care sector, securing jobs, and stimulating the economy. Similar measures were exercised by individual states such as the New South Wales government that passed a A\$2.3 billion stimulus package to

⁹ Nicole Prezel, et al. "Flabbergasted': Doctor Saw 70 Patients at Toorak Clinic While Infected with Coronavirus." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, The Sydney Morning Herald, March 7, 2020, www.smh.com.au/national/flabbergasted-doctor-saw-70-patients-at-toorak-clinic-while-infected-with-coronavirus-20200307-p547su.html.

¹⁰ Madeleine Heffernan, et al. "Melbourne School to Close until Sunday after Teacher Contracts Coronavirus." *The Age*, The Age, 10 Mar. 2020, www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/melbourne-school-to-close-until-sunday-after-teacher-coronavirus-case-20200310-p548o7.html.

sanitize state-owned buildings and maintain capital works and public asset maintenance.¹¹

On March 18, Governor-General David Hurley, the ceremonial Head of State, on the advice of the government, declared a human biosecurity emergency in response to the rapid transmission of the virus allowing “sweeping powers [to] become available to Health Minister Greg Hunt including imposing restrictions or preventing the movement of people and goods between specified places and evacuation.”¹² These measures were already enacted by specific states but the declaration introduced the federal government’s much needed involvement in uniting the states to follow any actions enacted by the Commonwealth. Due to the fact that domestic travel had become a significant source of transmission, Qantas airlines announced the suspension of 60% of its domestic flights and suspended all international flights until the end of May 2020.¹³ In an effort to continue driving an informed decision making approach, the National Covid-19 Commission Advisory Board was established by Morrison to lead the pandemic response through advising private-public partnerships and coordination meant to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.¹⁴ This was cushioned by the largest stimulus relief package announced by the Australian government of A\$130 billion on 30 March to support Australians who were unable to work due to closures prompted by the pandemic.¹⁵

¹¹ Ashleigh Raper, “NSW Government Announces \$2.3 Billion Coronavirus Stimulus Package.” *ABC News*, ABC News, April 6, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-17/nsw-government-reveals-2.3-billion-coronavirus-stimulus-package/12061322.

¹² Sarah McPhee, “Human Biosecurity Emergency Declared in Australia.” *NewsComAu*, News.com.au, March 21, 2020, www.news.com.au/national/politics/coronavirus-australia-human-biosecurity-emergency-declared/news-story/cd7fbff78297c076c8bb774595459c59.

¹³ Jamie Freed, “Qantas to Cease International Flying, Tells Majority of Workforce to Take Leave.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, March 19, 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-qantas/qantas-to-cease-international-flying-tells-majority-of-workforce-to-take-leave-idUSKBN21602W.

¹⁴ Shannon Jenkins, “National COVID-19 Coordination Commission Established.” *The Mandarin*, March 25, 2020, www.themandarin.com.au/128555-national-covid-coordination-commission-established/.

¹⁵ Paul Karp, “Australian Economic Stimulus Package: How Much Governments Have Committed to Coronavirus Crisis.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, March 31, 2020, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/mar/31/australian-economic-stimulus-package-how-much-governments-have-committed-to-coronavirus-crisis.

Domestic transmission had increased during the month, leading to the imposition of intrastate travel restrictions issued by the West Australian government led by Premier Mark McGowan to limit movement within the state as a result of outbreaks in specific states.¹⁶ Cases in Victoria had reached over 1,000 with 10% of those diagnosed with the virus being healthcare workers, and death rates continued to climb.¹⁷ The continued closures of businesses and industries to reduce transmission throughout Australia proved to be a worthwhile effort as the Australian Capital Territory was free of new cases on April 30. However, that did not last as domestic travel continued to fuel community spread. The spread was still isolated for the most part as with every new case the Australian government, whether that be the Commonwealth or the individual state governments, acted promptly and assertively to contain the virus and prevent mass outbreaks.

The second wave

This span of the pandemic was marked by a series of outbreaks throughout Australia starting in Victoria where cases connected to the food industry including restaurants like McDonalds led to increased transmission.¹⁸ As cases were identified, other states such as New South Wales imposed stricter restrictions on public gatherings. In mid-May, both South Australia and the Northern Territory were reported to be Covid-free with only the occasional case that was quickly addressed. However, things remained grim in Victoria which continued to face outbreaks with reports of a night duty manager

¹⁶ Eliza Laschon, "New Crackdown on Travel within WA as Massive Queues of Travellers Form Ahead of Border Closure." *ABC News*, ABC News, March 24, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-24/perth-stadium-becomes-coronavirus-hq-wa-travel-warnings-issued/12085616.

¹⁷ ABC News, "Melbourne Hospital's COVID-19 Inpatient Cluster Worsens as National Death Toll Rises to 24." *ABC News*, ABC News, April 2, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-02/coronavirus-death-toll-cases-rises-victoria/12112254.

¹⁸ Department of Health and Human Services Victoria, "Coronavirus Update for Victoria - 14 May 2020." *Department of Health and Human Services Victoria | Coronavirus Update for Victoria - 14 May 2020*, May 14, 2020, www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-update-victoria-14-may-2020.

at a Melbourne Quarantine Hotel testing positive and five additional security guards contracting the virus as well.¹⁹

In June, promise of eradication was on the horizons as the country reported its lowest national total of a single case since February. Unfortunately, Victorians once again were subjected to tightened restrictions after a spike in transmission near the end of the month. On June 30, the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews enforced a lockdown in Melbourne on 10 postcodes, only allowing residents to leave their homes for four reasons: to shop for essentials, medical/compassionate reasons, exercise in a group of no more than two, or for essential work/education purposes.²⁰ As cases continued to rise as a result of the mismanagement of the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria, Andrews added two additional postcodes to the lockdown which included nine public housing towers consisting of 3,000 people who were not allowed to leave their homes under any circumstances for 5 days.²¹ This outbreak caused other Australian states to act rapidly to reduce transmission with New South Wales asking the federal government to reduce the number of passengers arriving in Sydney as well as closing off its interstate borders.²² Andrews's government continued to increase restrictions such as requiring face coverings in Melbourne and the Shire of Mitchell, and imposing A\$200 fines for non-compliance. Following the declaration of a State of Disaster in August in Victoria, West

¹⁹ Richard Baker, "Patient Zero for Victoria's Second Wave Was Not a Security Guard." *The Age*, The Age, August 13, 2020, www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/patient-zero-for-victoria-s-second-wave-was-not-a-security-guard-20200813-p55li3.html.

²⁰ Alicia Nally, "Victoria Will Enforce a Local Lockdown for 10 Postcodes from Thursday. This Is How It Will Work." *ABC News*, ABC News, June 30, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-30/victorias-coronavirus-outbreak-prompts-stay-at-home-order/12407518.

²¹ ABC News, "More than 3,000 Melbourne Public Housing Residents Placed into 'Hard Lockdown'." *ABC News*, ABC News, 4 July 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-04/victoria-coronavirus-cases-rise-by-108-lockdown-new-postcodes/12422456.

²² Sarah Thomas, "International Arrivals Capped at Sydney Airport to Ease Quarantine Demands." *ABC News*, ABC News, 4 July 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-04/nsw-coronavirus-cap-on-arrivals-to-ease-quarantine-pressure/12422504.

Australia deferred its decision to ease restrictions tied to border closure due to the situation in Victoria.²³

Mismanagement, misconduct, and misinformation

Policies may be rational, and intentions may be good, but there will always be human intervention and therefore human error.

Operation Soteria

The National Cabinet created by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in March brought together leaders from all Australian states to collaborate in getting ahead of the virus and its transmission. After meeting on March 27, the National Cabinet agreed to require returning travelers to quarantine as a mandatory measure to decrease the risk of transmission into the greater Australian population. A Direction and Detention Notice was issued by Deputy Chief Health Officer starting March 28 and required all international passengers arriving in Victoria to go into hotel quarantine. The Chief Health Officer instructed those who arrive at airports in other Australia states to report to premises suitable for a 14-day isolation period before being allowed to return home. The Hotel Quarantine program in Victoria was then developed within 36 hours of the National Cabinet decision and commenced immediately to detain international arrivals as Victoria's biggest exposure to the pandemic was travel transmission rather than community transmission. Those who did not comply with the detention order were subjected to a fine of up to A\$19,836.40. The decision to mass quarantine passengers was based on the rising cases of Covid-19 in Australia and the fear that an uncontrollable outbreak would overwhelm the health care and hospital systems. The lack of adequate

²³ Yara Murray-Atfield and Joseph Dunstan, "Curfew and Exercise Limits for Melbourne Residents, Regional Victoria Moved to Stage Three Lockdown." *ABC News*, ABC News, August 3, 2020, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-02/victoria-coronavirus-restrictions-imposed-death-toll-cases-rise/12515914.

pre-planning for this large-scale initiative would lead to grave consequences for the state.²⁴

Two specific outbreaks were responsible for the second wave of Covid in Victoria leading to 18,418 cases and 768 deaths, being 90% of all of Australia's cases, and over 29,000 as of February 2021.²⁵ Outbreaks at the Rydges and Stamford Plaza Hotels in May and June were traced back to these hotels through genomic sequencing.²⁶ In May, a family of four returned from travel overseas and quarantined at the Promenade Hotel, after two members became symptomatic, they were relocated to the Rydges hotel where 3 workers initially became symptomatic.²⁷ In June, a traveler who quarantined at Stamford tested positive followed by a couple who returned from overseas.²⁸ One of the guards at the hotel became symptomatic following exposure leading to 46 linked cases to Stamford including 26 workers.²⁹ The movement of symptomatic travelers to 'hot hotel' facilities where Covid-positive patients were staying, led to transmission of the virus to contracted hotel staff that led to community spread. A lack of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) compliance and weak worker safety training created an environment where transmission was almost inevitable. The catastrophic repercussions caused by the mismanagement of the hotel quarantine program in Victoria led to the conduct of an inquiry by Justice Jennifer Coate which pinpointed government failure as the reason for the breaches in the containment of the virus.

²⁴ Jennifer Coate, *COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry*. Vol. 1, The Victorian Government, 2020. COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry <https://www.quarantineinquiry.vic.gov.au/volume-i>

²⁵ Josh Taylor, "Victoria Hotel Quarantine Failures 'Responsible' for Covid Second Wave and 768 Deaths, Inquiry Told." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 Sept. 2020, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/28/victoria-hotel-quarantine-failures-responsible-for-covid-second-wave-and-768-deaths-inquiry-told.

²⁶ Jennifer Coate, *COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry*. Vol. 2, The Victorian Government, 2020. COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry <https://www.quarantineinquiry.vic.gov.au/volume-i>

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Melbourne lockdowns

Following the spike in Covid cases in Victoria in July, a lockdown involving nine public housing towers was imposed by Andrews. The lockdown was immediate and required the residents to remain in their apartments, with no exceptions. This effort was enforced by the Victoria police. Due to the nature of the lockdown, the residents were caught unaware as it became binding almost immediately. Residents were unable to plan for those conditions and were therefore denied the ability to buy food or medicines to sustain them through the lockdown period.³⁰ The Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass found that the conduct of the government during this lockdown was a breach of human rights, denying residents their basic liberties.³¹ Many of the residents in the towers were refugees from war-torn countries such as South Sudan and the excessive police presence created a traumatizing experience for them as they were not fully aware of what was going on and were made to feel like criminals.³² The Victorian Public Tenants Association backed Glass in her findings and argued that cooperation between the police and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) could have prevented the cruel situation.³³

The second lockdown in Melbourne in August which imposed a daily curfew and permit checks enforced by Victorian police also became controversial when reports of harsh police crackdowns on residents surfaced.³⁴ Human Rights Watch reported the following misconduct by Victorian police:

“An Indigenous man riding his bike to work at about 5:30 a.m. on September 3 alleged that Victoria police tackled, assaulted, and racially abused him. Police say

³⁰ ABC News, "Victorian Government Rejects Ombudsman's Call to Apologise to Public Housing Residents over Towers Lockdown." ABC News. December 17, 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-17/lockdown-public-housing-towers-breached-human-rights-ombudsman/12991162>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Australia: Harsh Police Response During Covid-19." Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/australia-harsh-police-response-during-covid-19.

the man failed to stop when asked for a permit check. The police did not have their required body cameras turned on so there is no independent record.”³⁵

“The media have also reported incidents in which the police allegedly used harassing tactics. These include a law professor with cerebral palsy who alleges that the police told her to “move on,” preventing her from sitting down and resting while out with her 70-year-old mother; a heavily pregnant woman whom police reportedly ordered not to sit down at a park bench for a break; and a young tradesman whom the police fined for allegedly having the wrong column mistakenly filled out on his work permit.”³⁶

In September, the Victorian government passed an emergency measure expanding police powers to allow “designated officers” the ability to detain those who test positive for Covid-19 and are not likely to comply with directions to reduce transmission. Such an act leaves room for abuse as it does not give any concrete definition of how it would be carried out. Additionally, the notion of not being likely to comply is based on assumptions, not facts, giving free reign to officers to decide who might be non-compliant.

Polarization and criticisms

As with many nations across the world, Australia was not free of the polarization that came with enforcements of Covid-19 restrictions. The Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan faced criticism from businessman and former politician Clive Palmer who claimed that the border closure was unconstitutional and challenged the Premier’s decision in Federal Court. Premier McGowan responded by calling Palmer an “enemy of the state”, because of his concern for his financial prosperity rather than for public

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

health.³⁷ The attention that had to be given to this legal battle distracted attention from the health problem Australia was facing.

Corporate greed is not the only factor that has made the battle against Covid-19 difficult. Some politicians accepted inaccurate medical advice and dangerously promoted information that threatened the cohesion of the government's response. Liberal Party (Australia's conservative party) Member of Parliament, Craig Kelly, used his Facebook page to share articles that presented misinformation about Covid treatments claiming that Hydroxychloroquine and Ivermectin were effective treatments and that mask wearing practices were useless in preventing transmission, even comparing the practice to child abuse. He was subsequently banned from Facebook. Australian medical experts refuted the claim that an anti-parasitic medication such as Ivermectin had the capability to combat Covid. Global experts also cast doubt on Hydroxychloroquine being an effective treatment. In his battle to speak freely about these unproven medical tactics after Prime Minister Morrison publicly denounced the claims and privately asked Mr. Kelly to stop spreading misinformation, Craig Kelly resigned from the Liberal Party.³⁸

The Victorian outbreaks and lockdowns led to the fragmentation of opinion within Victoria and between Victoria and other Australian states. Many states relaxed their restrictions creating a clear distinction with Victoria. While the defense of these policies is based on the need to contain the virus, the quarantine methods were inappropriately imposed on several occasions resulting in outbreaks and human rights violations. They also led to polarizing political rhetoric such as conservative commentators referring to Labor Party Premier Andrews as #DictatorDan or Chairman Dan. Others responded with the #IStandWithDan which proved to be much more popular. While many aspects of the

³⁷ Daile Cross and Nathan Hondros, "I Think He's the Enemy of Australia': McGowan Ramps up War of Words with Palmer on WA Border Battle." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, The Sydney Morning Herald, July 31, 2020, www.smh.com.au/national/i-think-he-s-the-enemy-of-australia-mcgowan-ramps-up-war-of-words-with-palmer-on-wa-border-battle-20200731-p55hdj.html.

³⁸ "Craig Kelly Banned from Facebook for a Week for Posting Covid Misinformation." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, February 16, 2021, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/16/craig-kelly-banned-from-facebook-for-a-week-for-posting-covid-misinformation.

quarantine strategies were troubling, they were not done without reason. It is important to understand Australia's difficult history with quarantine measures that Covid exposed.³⁹

The role of national identity, defense and border control in pandemic response

Australia's geographical advantage of being an island nation served it well when controlling arrivals to the country. This was also true in previous contagious health emergencies that plagued Australia. The first confrontations between Australia and a deadly disease happened in 1900 when the Bubonic Plague arose. The fear associated with an unknown pathogen that caused high mortality fueled the first Australian quarantine response. Those who were thought to have come in contact with the plague were quarantined in New South Wales at the North Head Quarantine Station. This move was criticized due to its ill organization and potential to create outbreaks where they did not once exist. However, it cemented the view of quarantine being a valid approach to pandemics. Australian national identity was shaped by its advantageous geographical location that saw isolation from other nations as a form of immunity from the infections and diseases of non-Australia. This narrative played into racist ideologies that scapegoated migrants for disease emergence. It led to the merging of the Quarantine Act into the Immigration Restriction Act.⁴⁰

Almost twenty years later, the emergence of the Spanish Flu which was met with tactics such as border closures, quarantine camps, and school closures, which were initially beneficial until soldiers returned home and broke quarantine, causing an outbreak. This disaster created a new anxiety that would hamper the coordination efforts by the Commonwealth government with individual state governments. States decided to

³⁹ Timothy Graham, et al. "#IStandWithDan versus #DictatorDan: the Polarised Dynamics of Twitter Discussions about Victoria's COVID-19 Restrictions." *Media International Australia*, 2020, doi:10.1177/1329878x20981780.

⁴⁰ Kim Moloney and Susan Moloney, "Australian Quarantine Policy: From Centralization to Coordination with Mid-Pandemic COVID-19 Shifts." *Public Administration Review*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2020, pp. 671-682., doi:10.1111/puar.13224.

act on their own to control the spread of the virus, implementing unconstitutional policies such as border closures, a strategy used by Queensland. Unfortunately, the lack of a coordinated response led to uncontrollable infection spread which overwhelmed the health care sector. Decades later, the Avian Influenza of 1997 forced the government to recognize that it was unprepared to deal with pandemics and led to the creation of the 1999 Pandemic Plan. Once again, faced with another rapidly spreading virus, SARS of 2003, the Australian government quickly acted to discourage non-essential travel and conduct screenings of passengers before their entrance into the nation. These strategies proved effective as Australia only saw 6 infections and no deaths compared to the worldwide total of 8100 cases and 770 deaths. Finally, the H5N1 Avian Influenza left Australia untouched but was seen as an opportunity to plan for future pandemics. This event caused the Commonwealth to review the previous 1999 Pandemic Plan and strategize with state and territory leaders for two years to create a new plan of action called the 2008 Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI). The plan incorporated border control and social isolation measures. However, these measures did not include the 'hotel quarantine' approach, calling it problematic. The measures previously laid out proved to be useful when applied to the Covid-19 in Australia as cases remained low in comparison to other developed nations.⁴¹

Australia's success was not just accredited to its longstanding history with pandemics but also lessons learned from World War I and World War II which led to the establishment the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in 1926.⁴² The nation recognized the need for scientific involvement in regard to defense, health, and economic issues. Whether that be in the technological advancements such leading to the discovery of acetone by Chaim Weissman in 1912 which aided the British in combat during WWI, or to develop lifesaving medications or vaccinations that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Tom Spurling and Garret Upstill, "Coronavirus Lessons from Past Crises: How WWI and WWII Spurred Scientific Innovation in Australia." *The Conversation*, November 17, 2020, theconversation.com/coronavirus-lessons-from-past-crises-how-wwi-and-wwii-spurred-scientific-innovation-in-australia-136859.

are crucial to the control of pandemics such as Covid-19. The CSIRO contributed increasingly to the improvements in disease prevention as the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941 prompted its expansion especially in the scientific sector as a push to strengthen national defense efforts in anticipation for threats that may target Australia.⁴³ An emphasis on national defense also evoked wartime preparedness to support society in times of crisis which included the increased production of supplies and other necessary items. This effort manifested itself in March 2020 when the Commonwealth was able to provide masks for healthcare workers and those suspected of having Covid-19 as a preventative measure. For many other nations, such a task was a struggle which led to misinformation about the effectiveness of masks in preventing transmission which, if understood earlier, may have the lessened devastation endured by millions around the globe.

Lessons learned

The inquiry conducted by Justice Jennifer Coate about the mismanagement of the Hotel Quarantine Program and Australia's shaky past with quarantine strategies reveals the biggest lesson to be learned about Australia's ability to manage pandemics. As revealed in the historical analysis, quarantine implementation strategies have long been a point of vulnerability for Australia in controlling transmission by travel. This trend continued as a rushed program was put into action without the presence of proper health expertise.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) developed the Covid-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian health sector at the beginning of March 2020 detailing the steps to be taken to initially contain the virus: targeted action, peak action, and stand down and recovery steps. This plan was based on the general Commonwealth Pandemic Plan which had initially called hotel quarantines problematic and engaged in discussion about the costs of creating and maintaining these programs. The conception to operation

⁴³ *Ibid.*

timeline of the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria was 36 hours, a time frame that does not allow for sufficient pre-planning and coordination efforts by those who are required to administer the program. It also put a strain on resources and rushed the implementation leading to improper execution. Negligence created a complex and high-risk situation that involved dangerous large-scale detention of possibly infectious individuals. Those expected to carry out the demands of the state were left without sufficient guidance or precautionary measures to protect themselves or those for whom they were responsible.

One of the greatest failures of this program was the ambiguity regarding the control agency responsible for the conduct of the operation. While the DHHS initially understood and accepted responsibility for the operation, it left the job up to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) which was only supposed to act as a support agency.⁴⁴ The DJPR then sourced hotels to be used, contracted private workers, and organized logistics, a task for which it did not have the necessary expertise. Sourcing hotels to quarantine possibly infectious people was done without assessment of whether the premises were suitable for the undertaking and structurally sound for the lowest transmission risk. Subcontracting security guards, cleaners, and all other workers tasked with ensuring the effectiveness of the program, was problematic in nature as private sector contractors are often underpaid and thus have multiple jobs to meet their financial needs. This means that many of the workers were not only interacting with those that were detained but also the outside communities they were working within as well as each other. Transmission risk from this standpoint was high.

Many of the workers contracted by DJPR were not health literate or able to advocate for safer work environments or proper PPE which allowed them to contract the virus from the detained travelers and fueled their roles as sources of community spread.⁴⁵ The cleaners involved in the hotel quarantine program lacked the public health expertise

⁴⁴ Coate, Vol 1, *Op Cit.*, 10.

⁴⁵ Coate, Vol. 2, *Op Cit.*, 10.

required which should have been provided by the DHHS through Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) protocols in order to mitigate risks. However, the interpretation by the DHHS of its role in the operation as merely one of shared responsibility rather than the agency responsible for the delivery of a safe and effective program, aided in the breach of containment. Failure to assume its responsibilities after clearly accepting it had three major ramifications as presented by Justice Coate:

1. Mischaracterization of the program being a logistical/compliance endeavor rather than a Public Health Program.
2. Fragmented governance that removed DHHS Public Health team from its much-needed position as an overseer.
3. Leaders and other personnel carrying out the program did not have the public health expertise needed that may have prevented the outbreaks.⁴⁶

After the completion of the inquiry to investigate the breach in containment that fueled Victoria's second wave, Justice Coate proposed several recommendations to improve the program.⁴⁷ The Victorian government was receptive to the recommendations and implemented them in their new initiative led by Covid-19 Quarantine Victoria (CQV), an agency created to oversee all elements of the program. Premier Andrews announced this effort on November 30, 2020 to learn and adapt from the previous mismanagement of Operation Soteria.⁴⁸ The recommendations implemented include appointing leaders such as a Corrections Commissioner, a position held by Emma Cassar who directly reports to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to be supported by three Deputy State Controllers.⁴⁹ Andrews also heeded the advice from Justice Coate that cautioned the use of private contractors and replaced all previous staff with those employed by the state or directly contracting by the CQV.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "A Stronger Quarantine Program To Protect What We've Built." *Premier of Victoria*, November 29, 2020, www.premier.vic.gov.au/stronger-quarantine-program-protect-what-weve-built.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

only exception to this was the cleaning staff which is contracted through Alfred Health, a Melbourne based hospital.⁵¹

The Victoria Police force was to aid in supervision and ensure compliance. The department is supported by the Australian Defence Force as well as highly trained Resident Support Officers. Infection Prevention and Control measures and regulation were added to mitigate the risk of transmission through stricter cleaning and waste disposal efforts as well as increased access to PPE. This also included daily testing of staff and voluntary weekly testing of family members. Furthermore, work bubbles were imposed to ensure limited contact and to reduce the risk of transmission compared to the rotational schedules that the previously contracted workers were following. Regular audits and inspections of the facilities are expected to ensure compliance with IPC regulations and prevent another outbreak. Initiatives were also included for the physical, mental, and emotional health of the residents under self-isolation which created structured activities to reduce the stress involved with the mandatory quarantine. Lastly, the consultation of Alfred Health, one of Melbourne's leading hospitals, and their expertise in the health hotel models was considered to ensure the safety and rationale behind choices in hotels and facilities which balance risk and benefits.⁵²

Conclusions

Unified response

The early decision by the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to create a National Cabinet of federal and state leaders belonging to different parties, to centralize the response to the virus, was important as it provided one source of information for the Australian people. The government's willingness to defer to the scientific community also helped in reducing the effects of the pandemic. The cabinet operated such that information that was shared was mostly undisputed. A bipartisan approach was forged

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

to build trust with the public through the application of data and the expertise provided by public health experts.⁵³ The public was reassured by the critical involvement of experts such as Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brendan Murphy who always appeared besides Prime Minister Morrison during his Covid-19 briefings. This relayed the message to Australians that science was crucial in the approach to combat the pandemic.⁵⁴ Australia may not be unique in this regard, but it offered a clear example of best practice.

Does democracy ensure success during pandemics?

The table below, from December 2020, provides a comparison between Australia and the ten countries most afflicted with Covid-19.⁵⁵ It may be of assistance in examining the question of managing a pandemic under autocracy or democracy.

While there exists a view that in situations of crisis, authoritarian governments tend to perform better due to their ability to act swiftly without checks or balances, failures in various authoritarian countries such as Iran, Russia, and Turkey, cast doubt on that proposition.⁵⁶ That does not mean, however, that democratic institutions are inherently better at handling crises as shown by the incompetence demonstrated in the United States. Australia finds itself unique when compared to other Western liberal democracies. Australia had some of the lowest infection rates and deaths to comparable countries. Geography and history are clearly relevant, but a report produced by the University of Western Australia argued that Australia has been more sheltered than other liberal Western democracies from the rise of populist leaders that have created fragmented social and political environments. Australia was not immune to the effects of polarization whether by billionaires or right-wing politicians, but, overall, cohesive, and competent

⁵³ Jenny Child, et al. "Collaboration in Crisis: Reflecting on Australia's COVID-19 Response." *McKinsey & Company*, McKinsey & Company, December 15, 2020, www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/collaboration-in-crisis-reflecting-on-australias-covid-19-response.

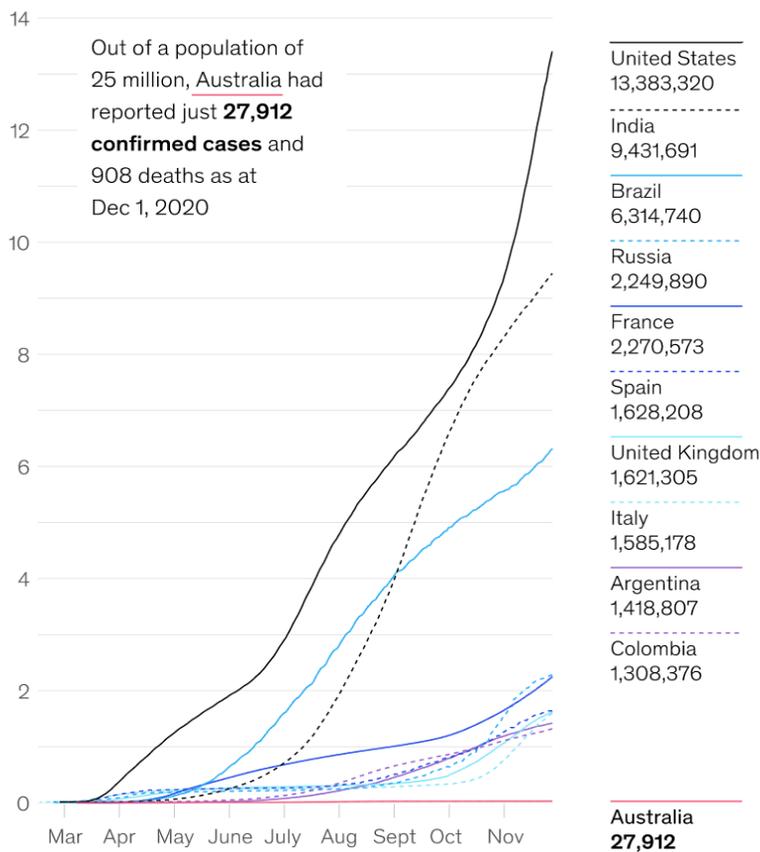
⁵⁴ Frances Mao, "Scott Morrison: How Australia's PM Rebuilt His Reputation." *BBC News*, BBC, May 19, 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-52703265.

⁵⁵ Child et al., *op. cit.*, 21.

⁵⁶ *Nationhood, National Identity & Democracy*. Commonwealth of Australia. 2021 https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024372/toc_pdf/Nationhood,nationalidentityanddemocracy.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

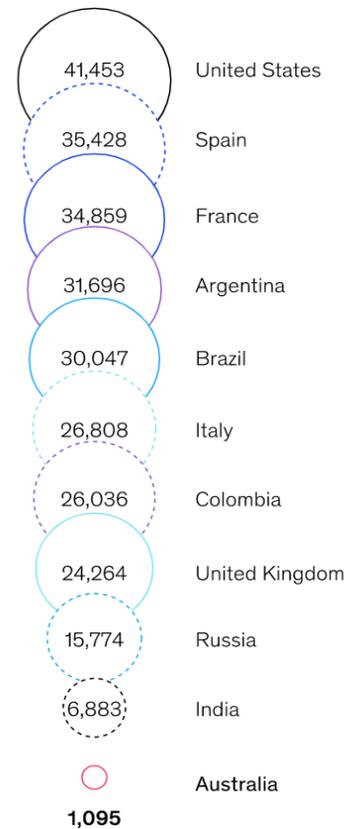
messaging by the various governments, justified pandemic restrictions and gained public cooperation.⁵⁷ This held even when faced by desultory anti-mask and anti-vaccine protests. Overall, Australia’s steady economic growth, impartial electoral management institutions, and state-funded services, distinguish the nation from many counterparts and cause the public to maintain trust in government.⁵⁸

Top ten countries for COVID-19 infections compared to Australia, million (cumulative) to Dec 1, 2020



Source: Johns Hopkins University; McKinsey analysis

COVID-19 cases, number per million to Dec 1, 2020



⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Morrison's lower approval rating from late 2019 and early 2020 following the Australian bush fires that his government did little to stop, set the bar low for Australian expectations of his performance in containing the virus.⁵⁹ His proactive response came as a surprise to many, but was in line with the past behavior of Australian governments in dealing with pandemics. A survey showed that in a group of 500 Australians, 80% believed that the Australian government was generally trustworthy, and 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the management of the Covid-19 pandemic increased their trust in the federal government; 85% attribute the results of the pandemic management to their increased trust and confidence in public health approaches and the science incorporated in achieving success.⁶⁰ As a result, Morrison's government's general success in protecting Australians led to his approval rating to rise to 66% which is one of the highest for any Australian prime minister in the past decade.⁶¹

The Achilles' heel

Although Australia has generally been successful in slowing the spread of the virus and eradicating it in many states at multiple points in time, its success does not come without at least one critical failure, the hotel quarantine calamity. While Victoria's hotel quarantine program exposed major vulnerabilities in the government's ability to manage such a complex operation, it was not the only state that struggled with outbreaks that stemmed from hotel quarantine. Australia has historically been at battle with the implementation of quarantine operations. During the past pandemics, the quarantine system has been revealed as problematic. The rhetoric that has been implanted by the use of these programs in the past, of non-Australians bringing diseases, had an echo when Andrews imposed a complete shutdown on public housing towers that held a large number of migrants. There is a suspicion that such decisions may have been abetted by

⁵⁹ Mao, *op cit.*, 21.

⁶⁰ Shaun Goldfinch, et al. "Trust in Government Increased during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Australia and New Zealand." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2021, pp. 3-11., doi:10.1111/1467-8500.12459.

⁶¹ Mao, *op cit.*, 21.

racism, flowing from the nation's geographic isolation. Fortunately, the receptiveness displayed by the Andrews government to implement the recommendations of Justice Coate demonstrates that Australia is willing to learn and adapt. This has been a theme that has been present throughout the pandemic. However, Australia should heed the reports from Human Rights Watch that have challenged its decision to expand police powers in maintaining quarantine operations to avoid a situation which may reduce trust in the system.

Overall, the Australian response was not perfect, but it did a successful job of maintaining national security and building public trust. Australian states can learn a lot from what occurred in Victoria. The bipartisanship provided by the National Cabinet allowed for the sharing of information and ideas and created a space where Australian leaders could collaborate to implement successful strategies. Australia seems to be on the road to recovery as the vaccine programs roll out. However, this has not meant that the government has let its guard down against this virus. Critics of border closure policies, mostly Liberal Party politicians who attacked those, such as Premier McGowan, now must concede that government action avoided catastrophic outbreaks like those seen in other Western democracies. McGowan's policies contributed to his popularity among his constituents which awarded him a staggering 88% approval rating.⁶² The support from the approval ratings showed to be legitimate with McGowan winning his re-election in a historic landslide.

Australia continues to respond assertively with lockdowns and closures in response to even a single case while continuing to provide economic support. Australia's success continues and can be credited to bipartisan efforts dedicated to public health measures driven by science, a model for nations around the world.

⁶² John Phillimore, "Meet Mark McGowan: the WA Leader with a Staggering 88% Personal Approval Rating." *The Conversation*, March 9, 2021, theconversation.com/meet-mark-mcgowan-the-wa-leader-with-a-staggering-88-personal-approval-rating-156293.

Chapter 3

**BRAZIL: NEGLIGENCE AND POPULISM
DURING A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS**

Gabriela Casco

Covid-19 arrived in Latin America relatively late but then spread quickly. Brazil is the largest country in Latin America with 211 million people and made considerable social progress between 2003 to 2014. Socioeconomic inequality has been part of the country's history since its inception but has been diminishing in recent years.¹ Covid-19 would provide a stern test for Brazil's leadership and its democracy.

Brazil has the second-highest number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the western hemisphere and the highest in Latin America. In another unwanted high ranking, Brazil leads the world in deforestation, disproportionately affecting 896,900 indigenous people, more than half of whom live in rural areas.² The indigenous population has been drastically affected by the pandemic, having already borne the brunt of deforestation, rapacious agrarian policies, and unlawful land confiscation. This report will plot the timeline of Brazil's management of Covid-19, President Jair Bolsonaro's role as a populist politician, and the treatment of indigenous people during the first year of this global health crisis.

¹ The World Bank, "The World Bank in Brazil," The World Bank, updated 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview>.

² IWGIA, "Indigenous World 2020: Brazil," IWGIA, 2021, <https://www.iwgia.org/en/brazil/3616-iw-2020-brazil.html>.

The pandemic hits

On February 3, 2020, the government declared Covid-19 a Public Health Emergency, in line with the World Health Organization. On February 26, 2020, the first case was confirmed to be a 61-year-old male Brazilian national who had returned from Italy.³ It was not until March 13, 2020, that the Brazilian health ministry confirmed the first few cases of community transmission. From the very beginning of the pandemic in Brazil, there were administrative mistakes from the World Health Organization as well as the Brazilian Health Ministry that would slow accurate tracking of transmission. On March 17, 2020, the first recorded death due to Covid-19 was confirmed in the state of São Paulo and was identified as an elderly man, infected due to community transmission. Every single state had at least one recorded death within a month.⁴ During the time the first case was presented in February, the health ministry was only testing and tracking infected individuals with a recent international travel history or those who had come in contact with a person that had been confirmed positive with COVID-19. This ignored the grim reality of community transmission which was gripping two of Brazil's largest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Six days after the first confirmation of community transmission, Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta expressed concern about the possibility of underreporting beyond the 600+ confirmed cases nationwide. On March 20, 2020, the Brazilian Government passed Ordinance No. 454 which required more options to better track the infection.⁵ It confirmed the reality of community transmission nationwide, stated the risks of unconstrained transmission, and called for quarantine measures for affected individuals.⁶

³ Carlos E. Raymundo, et al. 2021. Spatial analysis of COVID-19 incidence and the sociodemographic context in Brazil. *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 3:1-16.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Gustavo Ribiero, "Congress wants to place Bolsonaro in 'political quarantine,'" *The Brazilian Report*, March 17, 2021, <https://brazilian.report/coronavirus-brazil-live-blog/>.

⁶ ORDINANCE NO. 454, OF MARCH 20, 2020 (Ministry of Health/Minister's Office: Official Diary of the Union, 2020), 1.

On March 26, 2020 the Brazilian government presented a stimulus plan of US\$150 billion in response to the pandemic including the following measures:

- a) loosening of the fiscal target above the previously forecasted deficit of US\$ 24.8 billion;
- b) support for the most vulnerable population, with anticipation of the 13th month salary (US\$ 9.2 billion) and salary allowance (US\$ 2.5 billion), and reinforcement of Bolsa Familia (US\$ 620 million);
- c) relaxation of labor laws to maintain jobs;
- d) aid for informal and self-employed workers (US\$ 8 billion);
- e) extension of payment of taxes, FGTS and contributions reduction (US\$ 6 billion);
- f) financial support to states (US\$ 17.5 billion);
- g) financial support to the airline industry;
- h) expansion of liquidity in the markets, with the release of US\$ 40 billion in compulsory deposits;
- i) support from BNDES and public banks (BNDES: US\$ 11 billion + Caixa: US\$ 15 billion + Banco do Brazil: US\$ 25 billion);
- j) support for small and medium-size companies (US\$ 8 billion);
- k) postponement of readjustment of pharmaceuticals products.⁷

Ten days later, on March 30, 2020, a bill was passed by Brazil's Senate that guaranteed emergency aid of US\$120 per month to everyone over 18 years old considered to be informal workers, often being those under the poverty line. In addition, US\$207 was provided to each family with children during Brazil's recommended stay at home order which saw the closure of all shops, with the exception of essential businesses such as grocery stores, restaurants via take-out orders, drug stores, and gas stations. This particular bill was planned to provide the assistance for 3 months.

On April 6, 2020 Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta was criticized by President Bolsonaro for enforcing social-distancing and quarantine for all Brazilians rather than promoting a "vertical isolation" which prioritizes the isolation of the

⁷ KPMG, "Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19," KPMG, September 9, 2020, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/brazil-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html>.

immunocompromised and elderly.⁸ A few days later, Mandetta was fired by President Bolsonaro due to differences in management of the Covid-19 infection which had by then risen to 29,000 cases and 1,760 deaths, a 4,000% increase from the first confirmation of community spread one month earlier. The President continued to attack health officials, even as the cases and deaths skyrocketed, leading to journalists calling their weekly Covid-19 briefing as “Bloody Monday.”⁹ Soon after the sacking of the Minister of Health, the head of Brazil’s federal police was also fired, followed by the resignation of Justice Minister Sergio Moro.¹⁰ As cases continued to rise and powerful governmental leaders continued to leave their positions, President Bolsonaro continued to minimize the dangers of the spread of the virus and continued to ignore the growing concerns for the densely populated *favelas* of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Social distancing measures and accessibility to necessary hygienic products are compromised in these communities. In response, by the beginning of May 2020, civil society organizations were beginning to criticize the president.

Because of the social impacts of community transmission, on May 11, 2020, the Ministry of Economy expanded for four months the list of prophylactic products charged at a zero-tax rate.¹¹ Even as the cases continued to rise and the most vulnerable populations were exposed, President Bolsonaro continued to speak against social distancing measures and lockdowns leaving community organizers, local mutual aid initiatives, and elected officials to have to counter the president’s dangerous narrative. More specifically, particular *favelas* like the Paraisópolis took matters into their own hands to control the spread of the virus by having “block presidents” or community

⁸ Gerson Camarotti, “‘Ameaça não dá’, desabaf Mandetta em telefonemas a ministros,” *GLOBO*, June 4, 2020, <https://g1.globo.com/politica/blog/gerson-camarotti/post/2020/04/06/ameaca-nao-da-desabafa-mandetta-a-interlocutores.ghtml>.

⁹ Ribiero, “Congress wants to place Bolsonaro in ‘political quarantine’”, *op cit.*

¹⁰ Lorena G. Barberia and Eduardo J. Gómez, Political and institutional perils of Brazil’s COVID-19 Crisis, (n.p., *The Lancet*, 2020), 367-368.

¹¹ KPMG, “Government and institution measures”, *op cit.*

leaders monitor families and assign first responder volunteers.¹² Uncertain of the government response, local leaders took to social media to provide alerts and advice. By this stage, Brazil had the second highest number of cases world-wide, after the United States.

By June 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control, Brazil reported a total of 828,810 Covid-19 infections and by the end of the month would pass 50,000 deaths.¹³ In addition, there were discrepancies in Covid-19 data. According to multiple news outlets, the Health Ministry had removed public documentation on the pandemic and nationwide case numbers on the governmental website covid.saude.gov.br.¹⁴ The reasoning behind the removal from the president's perspective, was because "the cumulative data... does not reflect the moment the country is in... Other actions are underway to improve the reporting of cases and confirmation of diagnoses."¹⁵ This led to much distrust in communities and polarization within political world. The distrust of Brazilian citizens sparked several anti-Bolsonaro protests nationwide triggering pro-Bolsonaro counterprotests in response. The protestors expressed not only their opposition to Bolsonaro's response to the pandemic but also his disdain for vulnerable populations, especially the indigenous and black communities of Brazil.¹⁶

Accompanying the outrage of the general public, the next health minister, Nelson Teich, announced his resignation, only two months after Luiz Mandetta was fired. Nelson Teich held his predecessor's views, rejecting President Bolsonaro's minimization of the

¹² The New Humanitarian, "How Brazil's COVID-19 response has fallen to community leaders," *The New Humanitarian*, May 27, 2021. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/05/27/Brazil-coronavirus-response-community-leaders>.

¹³ F. A. Gouvea-Reis, Oliveira, P. D., Silva, D., Borja, L. S., Percio, J., Souza, F. S....de Moraes, C., COVID-19 Outbreak in a Large Penitentiary Complex, (Brazil, Emerging Infectious Diseases, 2021), 924-927. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid2703.204079>.

¹⁴ BBC News, "Coronavirus: Brazil becomes second country to pass 50,000 deaths," *BBC News*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-53132225>.

¹⁵ Ana Mano, "Brazil takes down COVID-19 data, hiding soaring death toll," *Reuters*, June 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil/brazil-takes-down-covid-19-data-hiding-soaring-death-toll-idUSKBN23D0PW>.

¹⁶ Aljazeera, "Thousands protest in Brazil amid coronavirus crisis," *Aljazeera*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/8/thousands-protest-in-brazil-amid-coronavirus-crisis>.

pandemic and lack of support for social distancing. Ignoring civil society as well as the growing Covid-19 infection rate and death toll, the president declared that beauty salons, barbershops, and recreational gyms were considered essential businesses.¹⁷ Bolsonaro was also facing another problem at this time when a former aide of the president's son was detained under corruption charges.¹⁸ By the end of June, thousands of Brazilians had taken to the streets in protest against the president, health officials remained at odds with the president, and community transmission continued to rise passing the figure of 1 million Covid-19 cases.

By August, South America had 4,239,782 cases with Brazil contributing 2,733,677. The infection rate, according to the International Organization of Migration, increased dramatically to 79% along with a 65% increase in the mortality rate.¹⁹ Although some seven months had passed since the first case of Covid-19, South America continued to struggle in its attempts to deal with the disease. On June 30, the Brazilian government had extended the international travel ban but included 10 exemptions:

1. Brazilian citizens, born or naturalized
2. Permanent residents of Brazil
3. National Immigration Registry Card Holders (Registro Nacional Migratório - RNM)
4. Foreign professionals employed by a non-governmental aid organization recognized by the Brazilian government
5. Foreign officials accredited by the Brazilian government
6. Spouse, domestic partner, son or daughter, father or mother, or caregiver of a Brazilian citizen
7. A foreigner of any nationality who has a visit visa granted for a short stay, with no intention of establishing residence, or of those for whom the visiting visa is waived, for the purpose of performing artistic, sporting or business activities.

¹⁷ Dom Philips, "Brazil loses second health minister in less than a month as covid-19 deaths rise," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/15/brazil-health-minister-nelson-teich-resigns>

¹⁸ BBC News, "Brazil corruption: Police arrest ex-aide to Jair Bolsonaro's Son Flávio," *BBC News*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-53099553>.

¹⁹ IOM, COVID-19 Disease South America Regional Response (Reporting Period 8 July - 4 August 2020), (n.p., IOM, 2020), 1-10.

8. Any foreigner of any nationality who comes to the country in order to establish residence for a specific time and who has a temporary visa for the following purposes:
 - a. research, teaching or academic extension;
 - b. study;
 - c. work;
 - d. making an investment;
 - e. family reunion; or
 - f. artistic or sports activities with a fixed-term contract.
9. Any person whose entrance into Brazil is deemed by the government to be in the public interest.
10. Travelers in transit in one of the following categories:
 - a. Cargo delivery
 - b. International passengers making a connection who do not leave the international transit area
 - c. Passengers required to disembark for aircraft refueling or repairs
 - d. Flight crews

Almost one month after the ban was extended and these exemptions were announced, the reopening of borders for foreign tourists traveling by air to Brazil was announced. The only requirement other than providing a negative Covid-19 test was proof of health insurance valid in Brazil to ensure coverage throughout their trip.²⁰ The travel ban to Brazil by land and sea was extended for another 30 days. No reasons were given for the premature reopening for foreign tourists.²¹

Brazil continued to struggle with community transmission, a scarcity of healthcare facilities, a failing economy, as well as a rise in gender-based violence. Community transmission was most prevalent in densely populated *favelas* as well as the “informal settlements” occupied by Venezuelan refugees. Although the Brazilian government maintained a ban on land and sea travel, Brazil accepted over 8,000 refugees into the

²⁰ “Brazil Extends Entry Ban to July 29,” “U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Brazil, 2020, <https://br.usembassy.gov/brazil-extends-entry-ban-to-july-29/>.

²¹ Ricardo Brito and Marcelo Rochabrun, “UPDATE 1-Brazil reopens international flights to tourists even as coronavirus deaths spike,” *Reuters*, July 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-brazil-travel/update-1-brazil-reopens-international-flights-to-tourists-even-as-coronavirus-deaths-spike-idUSL2N2F036J>.

country, with 7,787 of them being from Venezuela contributing to the 45,000 Venezuelan refugees in the country. The economic emergency aid that had been passed in April was extended for another three months.²² By mid-August, there were over 3,400,000 confirmed cases and over 100,000 deaths. According to a medical journal, the case fatality rate of these confirmed cases was 3.2%.²³

September was originally seen as a month of progress for Brazil with India overtaking it for second place in confirmed cases and deaths. Morbidity and mortality began to drop. Although this was positive news, the death rate was still staggering, hovering around 900 per day.²⁴ Infectious disease experts like Roberto Medronho continued to warn the public to remain vigilant during this period, otherwise they lead to spikes as communities ignore social distancing measures. Brazil also had the sad distinction of having the youngest Covid-19 death yet recorded with an infant of just two months dying of Covid-19 related complications.²⁵ Although there was little information provided regarding the infant's death, there was speculation the child suffered from comorbidities. The case nevertheless sparked a debate on what should be classified as "at risk" in Brazil, perhaps going beyond the elderly and immunocompromised. The lack of adequate testing prevented health officials from obtaining accurate transmission information which led different researchers and analysts to try to track mobility data independently. According to an analysis from *Reuters*, the number of people commuting to and from work went from a 37.8% reduction rate in the early period to only 16% later

²² UNHCR, "Brazil Operation: Covid-19 Response," UNHCR, August 2020, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Brazil%20COVID-19%20Update%20-%20August%202020.pdf>.

²³ M. Monteiro de Oliveira, T.L. Fuller et al., Controlling the COVID-19 Pandemic in Brazil: a challenge of continental proportions (*Nature Medicine*, 2020), n.p.

²⁴ Pedro Fonseca, "After months of heartache, signs of COVID-19 easing in Brazil" *Reuters*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-plateau/after-months-of-heartache-signs-of-covid-19-easing-in-brazil-idUSKBN25T3AG>

²⁵ São Bernardo Info, "Bebê de apenas 2 meses more por coronavirus em São Bernardo," *São Bernardo Info*, September 11, 2020, <https://saobernardodocampo.info/50554/bebe-meses-coronavirus/>

in the year.²⁶ September ended with 4,813,586 confirmed cases and 143,886 Covid-19 related deaths.²⁷

From October to December, the infection rates once again began to rise, and community transmission continued to devastate the most vulnerable populations of Brazil. In a positive development, Brazil signed a \$90 million vaccine deal with the Chinese corporation, Sinovac Biotech, though the finer details were not made public.²⁸ While there was controversy about the intended price to be charged for the vaccine and there were concerns regarding discriminatory access, President Bolsonaro maintained the idea of Brazil being among the first countries to distribute a vaccine.²⁹

Politics

As elsewhere in the world, the pandemic buffeted Brazilian politics and put a strain on its democracy. Former military general Jair Bolsonaro mimicked Donald Trump in espousing populist and demagogic positions. He employed an anti-elite rhetoric. He embraced the concept of advocating for the "pure" or nuclear people of Brazil. This kind of populist rhetoric divides the nation. Bolsonaro played to these divisions by employing certain cultural references and following policies that appealed narrowly to his supporters. Populism thrives under heightened polarization which Brazil has experienced for years. Bolsonaro's populism dragged Brazil even deeper into democratic erosion. The strategy has been described as centering on four major themes:

- Polarizing political rhetoric centered in 'us' vs 'them'
- Rhetorical focus on intergroup competition
- Deepening affective polarization
- Perceptions of the policies of the "Other" as an existential threat to the nation³⁰

²⁶ Fonseca, *op cit.*

²⁷ UNHCR, "Brazil Operation: Covid-19 Response", *op cit.*

²⁸ Global Times, "Sao Paulo signs agreement with Chinese producer for COVID-19 vaccine doses, but price over \$2 each," *Global Times*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202629.shtml>.

²⁹ Grady McGregor, "A state in Brazil says it may be among the first to deploy a COVID-19 vaccine," *Fortune*, October 6, 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/10/06/covid-vaccine-first-brazil-sao-paulo-sinovac/>.

³⁰ J. McCoy, T. Rahman, & M. Somer, "Polarization and the global crisis of democracy: Common patterns, dynamics, and pernicious consequences for democratic polities", *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2018, 16-42.

Bolsonaro's tactics include attacking "leftist" ideologies such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and land rights. His rhetoric includes opposition to globalization and strengthening security measures to prevent illegal immigration. The president normalized populist rhetoric and entertained conspiracy theories, as well as calling for the expulsion or arrest of his adversaries.³¹ Specifically, he labeled the actions of Brazil's civil society movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores* (Landless Workers Movement) as terrorism and called its members "vagrants and outcasts".³² Bolsonaro described intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations and its Human Rights Council as a "meeting place for communists" and expressed his intention to withdraw Brazil's membership.³³ Bolsonaro's successful election with the right-wing populist Social Liberal Party (PSL) attracted 52 members of Congress to the party. This has weakened the party system on which democracy relies. But just a year into his presidency, Bolsonaro left the Social Liberal Party in November 2019 to move closer to ultra conservative and evangelical support groups. The President then announced the creation of his very own political party named Alliance for Brazil, though others call it *bolsonarista populismo*.³⁴

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), a 33-member intergovernmental group based in Stockholm, Brazil is one of four countries experiencing the greatest democratic decline.³⁵ This type of severe democratic erosion, or democratic backsliding, has been heightened under the pandemic. Brazil can now be considered a hybrid regime with autocratic features alongside democratic institutions featuring repressive laws and declines in civil liberties while simultaneously

³¹ Robert Muggah, "Foreign Policy in Brazil: a sharp turn to the right" *Open Democracy*, October 21, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/foreign-policy-in-brazil-sharp-turn-to-right/>.

³² Jeferson Ribeiro, "Bolsonaro quer tipificar invasão de propriedade por MST e MTST como prática terrorista," *O GLOBO*, May 21, 2018, <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/bolsonaro-quer-tipificar-invasao-de-propriedade-por-mst-mtst-como-pratica-terrorista-22702521>.

³³ Muggah, *op cit*.

³⁴ Marília Arantes, "A president without a party: Bolsonaro's strategy to depoliticize Brazil" *Open Democracy*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/bolsonaro-president-without-party-strategy-depoliticize-brazil/>.

³⁵ IDEA, "The Global State of Democracy in Focus: A Special Brief," IDEA, December 2020, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/global-democratic-trends-before-and-during-covid-19-pandemic.pdf>.

holding elections. Throughout the pandemic, President Bolsonaro continued this democratic erosion by denying the severity of the virus, allowing for indigenous lands to be invaded due by mining companies, and carelessly funding economic initiatives.

Brazil suffers from so many Covid-19 infections and related deaths because of the sitting president's lack of preparation, encouragement of false information, and complete disregard of guidelines from health professionals. The populist rhetoric of Bolsonaro along with the catastrophic realities of the pandemic have contributed to the democratic erosion of Brazil. Bolsonaro's main focus throughout 2020 was not to stop the spread of the virus and protect the health of his people, but rather to prioritize the economic growth of the nation by keeping the country open, without social distancing or a mask mandate which he vetoed.³⁶ Bolsonaro's obvious disregard for public health meant limited funding for healthcare. Bolsonaro will campaign on his economic management "success" in the upcoming 2022 presidential elections.³⁷

Bolsonaro, a politician continuously speaking against supposedly "fake news", spread misinformation to the public regarding the severity of the virus, campaigned in disregard of social distancing precautions, and supported dubious treatments with chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine. The resulting high demand for these medications prevented individuals with other diseases like lupus and arthritis to have access to the medications. He held weekly live stream events on Facebook to advertise these so-called medical successes. Facebook became one of Bolsonaro's most important platforms to reach out to his supporters:

"in terms of the consolidation of Bolsonaro's image as an alternative to the political elite and traditional media... Every Thursday, starting at 7pm, the Brazilian president presents a 'live' on his official Facebook page with a weekly summary of the actions performed by his government. The lives are audiovisual content that value intimacy and spontaneity, with a certain degree of formality

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁷ Barberia and Gómez, *op cit.*, 367-368.

and decorum. The ambiance is sober – consisting of a large wooden table, a bookcase full of books in the background and participants dressed formally (as shown in Figure 1). Nevertheless, in it, the president seeks to talk to supporters in an informal tone and offer them a space for chatting among themselves.”³⁸

The presidential rejection of the advice of health professionals caused great strain with the Health Ministry and the resignation of several officials were having a negative impact on the president’s polling numbers.³⁹ The president’s approval rate dropped to 33% while the disapproval rate rose to 38%, just days after Sergio Moro’s resignation from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.⁴⁰ The polling tends to demonstrate that lying about the pandemic and presenting an unrealistic rosy picture of the situation was not a successful tactic and only achieved greater polarization.

That polarization led to civilian unrest during the summer of 2020. Four months into the pandemic, though there were already 600,000 cases and 36,000 deaths, President Bolsonaro responded to journalists’ inquiries about these numbers with “So what?... I’m sorry but what do you want me to do about it?” when questioned about his lack of urgency to take steps to control community spread.⁴¹ As a response to this lack of urgency and carelessness, thousands of Brazilians organized large protests to speak out against Bolsonaro’s handling of the pandemic. Expressing disdain towards the president, many organizers also came out in solidarity with the contemporaneous Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, pointing to similar problems faced by the Afro-Brazilians in Brazil. Counter protests by supporters of Bolsonaro also occurred using anti-mask

³⁸ Ana Caroline Monari, Allan Santos, and Igor Sacramento, COVID-19 and (hydroxy)chloroquine: a dispute over scientific truth during Bolsonaro’s weekly Facebook live streams, (n.p., JCOM, 2020), 1-17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisas “Bolsonaro é aprovado por 33%, e 45% apoiam processo de impeachment,” Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisas, April 28, 2020, <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2020/04/1988698-bolsonaro-e-aprovado-por-33-e-45-apoiam-processo-de-impeachment.shtml>.

⁴¹ Jihan Abdalla, “What is next for Brazil in its coronavirus fight?,” *Aljazeera*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/3/what-is-next-for-brazil-in-its-coronavirus-fight>.

rhetoric as well as support for the full economic reopening of the country.⁴² The precautions against the pandemic, in the eyes of the president's supporters, had simply been added to the long list of unrelated issues being targeted in the Brazilian version of the culture war. But an unexpected turn came when a Federal Judge, Renato Borelli, warned president Bolsonaro that he would face a daily fine of US\$387 if he continued to refuse to wear a mask in public.⁴³

The Indigenous community bears the brunt of the pandemic

COVID-19 devastated the most vulnerable communities in Brazil, and, among them, the Indigenous community paid the highest price. There is limited disaggregated data about the health impacts of the pandemic, but the little that does exist, along with anecdotal accounts from community members, points to a tragic situation among indigenous communities. According to one study, among Indigenous people in Brazil in 2020, there have been 29,008 registered Covid-19 cases and 532 deaths. The fatality rate of the Indigenous people is 1.8%. The data, however, is drawn only from cases registered by officials. Anecdotal accounts would suggest that the data is tragically conservative.

The Indigenous population of Brazil that was struck by the pandemic had already been under attack over their land rights. Brazil's 896,917 indigenous people have 505 reservations for its 306 ethnic groups that speak 274 different languages.⁴⁴ Brazil's indigenous people are facing a combination of unlawful land confiscation, lack of healthcare facilities, and limited safeguarding measures. The problems of the indigenous

⁴² Aljazeera, "Thousands protest in Brazil," *op cit*.

⁴³ Ricardo Brito and Educarado Simões, "Brazil judge orders Bolsonaro to wear a mask due to COVID-19," *Reuters*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil/brazil-judge-orders-bolsonaro-to-wear-a-mask-due-to-covid-19-idUSKBN23U22Q>

⁴⁴ Pamela Jacquelin-Andersen (ed.), *The Indigenous World 2018*, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, p.185. <https://www.iwgia.org/images/documents/indigenous-world/indigenous-world-2018.pdf>

people are compounded by the hostility of the President Bolsonaro and his support for agrarian and mining interests.⁴⁵

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Table 2 Distribution of Indigenous affected by COVID-19 for suspected cases, confirmed cases, recovered cases, and deaths distributed by the special indigenous health district (dSEI)

dSEI	Suspected cases	Confirmed cases	Active cases	Clinical cure (recovered cases)	Deaths
Alagoas and Sergipe	7	7	4	1	1
Altamira	4	13	9	4	0
Alto Rio Juruá	0	5	5	0	0
Alto Rio Negro	0	113	99	9	5
Alto Rio Purus	0	20	14	4	2
Alto Rio Solimões	12	400	103	273	23
Amapá and Norte do Pará	0	117	67	49	0
Araguaia	0	0	0	0	0
Bahia	4	11	10	0	0
Ceará	69	143	95	45	2
Cuiabá	0	0	0	0	0
Guamá-Tocantins	3	137	76	50	11
Interior Sul	39	87	47	40	0
Kaiapó do Mato Grosso	0	0	0	0	0
Kaiapó do Pará	3	33	30	0	1
Leste de Roraima	10	64	44	17	3
Litoral Sul	5	19	13	5	1
Manaus	10	98	17	74	3
Maranhão	82	116	112	1	1
Mato Grosso Do Sul	10	76	44	32	0
Médio Rio Purus	0	9	0	9	0
Médio Rio Solimões and Afluentes	0	77	38	34	5
Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo	28	3	0	3	0
Parintins	0	30	9	19	2
Pernambuco	2	40	13	21	2
Porto Velho	25	12	8	3	1
Potiguara	18	20	14	6	0
Rio Tapajós	67	20	14	2	3
Tocantins	0	0	0	0	0
Vale do Javari	2	4	3	1	0
Vilhena	0	0	0	0	0
Xavante	0	4	3	0	1
Xingu	2	0	0	0	0
Yanomami	18	59	43	13	3
Total	420	1737	934	715	70

Figure 1: *Journal of Racial & Ethnic Health Disparities*

It is not clear how isolated communities within the Amazon became infected in the first place. According to the *Journal of Racial & Ethnic Health Disparities* (Figure 1), only six Indigenous groups in Brazil have no confirmed Covid-19 cases. The vectors of

⁴⁵ Aljazeera, “Brazil: Coronavirus pandemic reaches dozens of Indigenous groups,” *Aljazeera*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/16/brazil-coronavirus-pandemic-reaches-dozens-of-indigenous-groups>.

infection are likely to be the highways that bring miners, lumberjacks, and adventurers into contact with indigenous communities in the Amazon.⁴⁶ The issue of the development of the Amazon rainforest has been one of the major political issues in Brazil for decades. Recent governments have provided some protection for the rainforest and its inhabitants and Brazil was sensitive to its obligations under the International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, no. 169.⁴⁷ Part II of the Convention deals with land rights and Article 18 specifies, "Adequate penalties shall be established by law for unauthorised intrusion upon, or use of, the lands of the peoples concerned, and governments shall take measures to prevent such offences."⁴⁸ Additionally, the International Labour Organization emphasizes the need for national agrarian programs to ensure the development of the indigenous peoples and the need to ensure proper consent for the sale of land. Unfortunately, these provisions are often ignored, and the situation has become critical under the current Bolsonaro Administration which favors economic development over indigenous rights.

As noted, Brazil engages in massive deforestation the rate of which rose by 85% in 2019 under the Bolsonaro Administration.⁴⁹ There is support by President Bolsonaro for the reopening of Highway BR-319 which was built in 1973 but abandoned 15 years later. The highway from Porto Velho to Manaus cuts through largely untouched areas of the Amazon Forest and the isolated, self-sufficient indigenous communities that live within it. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Manaus has been the epicenter for community transmission amongst the Indigenous communities. From a climate control perspective, the continuation of deforestation in Brazil will create irreversible damage to the

⁴⁶ Victor Santana Santos, Adriano Antunes Souza Araújo, Jarbas Ribeiro de Oliveira, Lucindo José Quintans-Júnior, Paulo Ricardo Martins-Filho, COVID-19 mortality among Indigenous people in Brazil: a nationwide register-based study, (*Journal of Public Health*, 2020).

⁴⁷ Lucas Ferrante, Mércio Gomes, and Philip M. Fearnside. 2020. Amazonian indigenous peoples are threatened by Brazil's Highway BR-319. *Land Use Policy* 94, 104548.

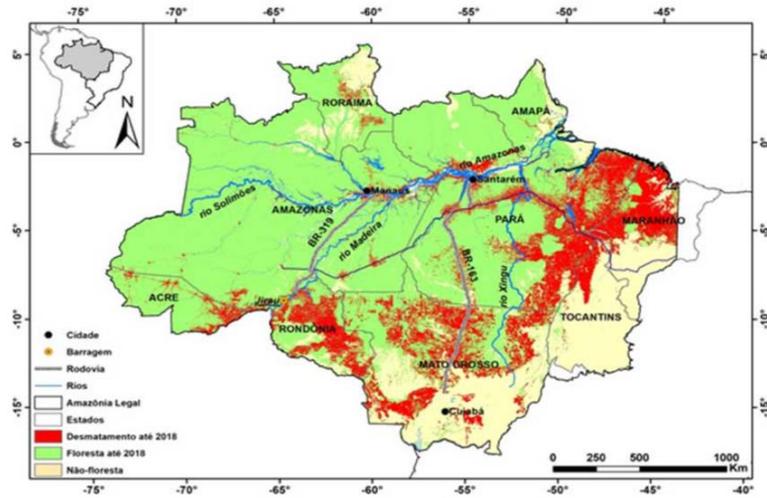
⁴⁸ International Labour Organization, "C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)," ILO,

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Brazil: Events of 2020," Human Rights Watch, 2021,

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/brazil>.

ecosystem and lead to mass migration.⁵⁰ The law requires that, before any developmental initiative such as the reopening of Highway BR-319 is approved, the developers must conduct an environmental impact assessment to ensure the preservation of the Amazon ecosystem. The assessment predicted many negative environmental impacts, but it was ignored by the Brazilian government and the developers.⁵¹ Another concern is that the Highway BR-319 will give developers much more access to untouched and unpatrolled land, essentially putting indigenous populations in an even more vulnerable situation. Aside from the environmental impact assessment, the most eloquent evidence of damage is the observation of continuous forest fires intentionally and illegally lit by developers (Figure 2).⁵²



Brazil's Legal Amazon region. The "arc of deforestation" is the red area along the southern and eastern edges of the forest. The BR-319 cuts the remaining Amazon basin forest in half, providing access to vast areas of standing forest by those who have deforested the eastern and southern portions of the region. Deforestation data courtesy of Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

Figure 2

⁵⁰ Lucas Ferrante and Philip Martin Fearnside. "The Amazon's Road to Deforestation." *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 369, no. 6504 (2020): 634–634. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abd6977>.

⁵¹ Philip M. Fearnside, "The beginning of the end for Brazil's Amazon Forest (commentary)," Mongabay, accessed on March 9, 2021, <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/11/br-319-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-brazils-amazon-forest-commentary/>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Facing illegal occupation by miners and the manipulation of infrastructure developers, indigenous leaders continue to take initiatives to protect their land as well as control the spread of the virus. From the very start of the pandemic, local environmental defenders spearheaded educational and healthcare initiatives for their villages. Indigenous grassroots organizations have appointed volunteers to conduct contact tracing and to track infection and death rates in their communities. In specific response to president Bolsonaro's discouragement of social distancing and other Covid-19 preventative measures, grassroots organizers have created accessible information to promote awareness to prevent community transmission. Community-specific campaigns continue to be launched such as the Covid-19 directory for the quilombola territories named "Quilombo without Covid-19." This specific website provides up-to-date information on community transmission within the territories while emphasizing their mission:

The invisibility of the disease in quilombola territories reveals a dramatic situation, which has not received due attention from public authorities and the dominant media. Data on disease transmission in quilombola territories are underreported, as many municipal departments fail to report when disease transmission and death occur between quilombola people. Both the health secretariats and the Ministry of Health itself have neglected specific attention in relation to black communities. Part of the problem is the lack of epidemiological data for quilombola populations. In addition to the great underreporting of cases, situations of difficulties in accessing exams and denial of exams to people with symptoms have been reported by people from the quilombos.

This observatory is a realization of the National Coordination of Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities [CONAQ] with the Socio-Environmental Institute and the information on quilombola cases comes from the autonomous monitoring

developed by Conaq with the territories in which it operates. In relation to the national panorama, official data from the State Health Secretariats are used.⁵³

This webpage not only provides interactive and consistent community resources but also provides in-depth information about the oppressive history faced by quilombos under the health care system and at the hands of government institutions. Community-led organizations such as the Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil have been active in defending land rights.⁵⁴ These kinds of initiatives have led indigenous communities to challenge Bolsonaro to discharge the government's ethical and constitutional duty to protect the lives of the Brazilian people and especially its indigenous communities.⁵⁵ Due to the grassroots organizing of these communities along with their specific call to action, on August 5, 2020 the Supreme Court ruled that President Bolsonaro "must adopt measures to stop the spread of novel coronavirus to the country's vulnerable indigenous communities."⁵⁶ The measures specified by the Supreme Court were to allow the "sanitary barriers" to prevent outsiders from entering the communities, and thus prevent community transmission. As not unexpected, lawmakers were hesitant to stop illegal miners and invaders from entering the tribal lands. Due to the Brazilian government's inaction to prioritize the health and human rights of the indigenous people, defenders have no option but to approach the international community, including the United Nations. Indigenous communities brought awareness of the neglect of the Brazilian government, challenged the government in the Supreme Court, and produced hundreds of mutual aid initiatives to stop the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, Covid-19 is still

⁵³ CONAQ & ISA, "Quilombo without Covid-19," CONAQ & ISA, 2020, <https://quilombosemcovid19.org/>

⁵⁴ APIB, "Articulações dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil," APIB, <https://apiboficial.org/apib/?lang=en>.

⁵⁵ Gabriela Russo Lopes and G. Mairon Bastos Lima, Necropolitics in the Jungle: COVID-19 and the Marginalisation of Brazil's Forest Peoples, (*Bulletin of Latin American research*, 2020) p.39, 92.

⁵⁶ Reuters Staff, "Brazil's court rules government must protect tribes from coronavirus" *Reuters*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-indigenous/brazils-court-rules-government-must-protect-tribes-from-coronavirus-idUSKCN251361>

spreading at a high rate, Indigenous land is still being invaded by illegal loggers and miners, and it is the land defenders that have been persecuted.⁵⁷

Conclusion

As of March 2021, Brazil has 11.3 million registered cases at a daily average of 69,000 cases; 9.98 million have recovered but 273,000 have died.⁵⁸ The president's endorsement of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine gave the country a sense of false hope, as community transmission continued unabated. The president's economic strategy of keeping businesses up and running have had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable populations. Civil unrest was an inevitable result of the president's policies of polarization. In response, local organizations began to mobilize and learn from one another how to be efficient first responders, community health advocates, and public health educators.

Due to the lack of preventative resources, the indigenous population had no alternative but to educate themselves about public health regulations and hygienic practices through community-led initiatives. Indigenous leaders obtained a verdict in the Supreme Court that ultimately forced the Brazilian government to provide Covid-specific measures to protect these communities. This kind of policy work has empowered more vulnerable populations to focus the conversation on governmental corruption. By the end of 2020, unemployment had risen to 14%, an all-time high, and the government's 9-month cash payments came to an end, replaced by narrower and less generous support. Bolsonaro's populist strategies have also hurt the nation's democratic development. The one ray of hope is that vaccines will end the pandemic, but even this was put into question

⁵⁷ International Federation for Human Rights, "Brazil: Covid-19 deaths of human rights defenders due to dismantling of social policies and government neglect," International Federation for Human Rights, February 8, 2021, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/brazil-covid-19-deaths-of-human-rights-defenders-due-to-dismantling>.

⁵⁸ Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, "Coronavirus Resource Center," updated March 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>.

by the discovery of new variants of Covid-19, including the Brazilian strain. Meanwhile Brazil stumbles leaderless through the storm.

Chapter 3

CUBA'S VAUNTED MEDICAL SYSTEM FACES COVID-19

Javier Nino

With the outbreak of a global pandemic, Cuba has a distinct advantage over most countries in the global South – it has a highly admired medical system. The burden of this chapter is to examine the extent to which Cuba's medical advantage shielded the nation from the impact of Covid-19. The issue of Cuba's authoritarianism is therefore dealt with indirectly. There are many autocracies in the world, but how many of them export doctors to other countries?

Cuba's Health System

The Cuban health system is famous. Cuba benefits from having universal healthcare that boasts the highest number of medical doctors per capita worldwide. The country has one of the highest life expectancies of 77 in the region.¹ Cuba has a well-structured primary healthcare system, the centerpiece of which is the community-based polyclinic, each of the 498 nationwide serving a catchment area of between 30,000 and 60,000 people.² The results can be seen from the dramatic reduction in infant mortality, down to seven deaths for every 1,000 children aged less than five, a result comparable to that of the United States.³

¹ WHO, "Cuba's primary health care revolution: 30 years on", Bulletin of the World Health Organization, WHO, May 2008. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/5/08-030508/en/>

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

Drawing on this reputation, doctors have become Cuba's leading export, surpassing coffee or sugar. The initiative to send Cuban doctors abroad started in 1960, when it sent 'medical brigades' to the Algerian war of independence.⁴ The initiative developed into an industry. Leasing healthcare professionals to foreign governments brings in around US\$11 billion each year, making it a bigger source of revenue than even the tourism industry, with some 50,000 Cuban doctors working across 67 countries.⁵ The leasing system became a target of criticism by the right-wing President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, who called the doctors "Cuban slaves feeding the Cuban dictatorship", and in response, about 1,300 of Brazil's 8,300 Cuban doctors left the country.⁶ Cuba has in particular provided medical support to the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americans (ALBA), a block of countries once led by Venezuela's late Hugo Chavez, that sees itself as an alternative to the what ALBA considers as the neoliberalist Organization of American States.⁷

When Covid-19 came to the island, about 20% of the population was in the age range most susceptible to the novel coronavirus.⁸ Risk factors such as diabetes which occurs in 64.3 out of 1,000 people and hypertension, which affects nearly a fourth of the population, had to be calculated into the Cuban response.⁹ On the positive side, Cuba has the capacity to manufacture its own personal protective equipment (PPE) and has a viable pharmaceutical industry providing a possible response to the pandemic. Cuba's centrally planned economy is highly reliant on tourism, requiring the government to find a balance between healthcare and a struggling economy. The fact that the economy is largely in government hands gives the government additional tools with which to deal with a

⁴ Maria C. Werlau, "Cuba's Health-Care Diplomacy: The Business of Humanitarianism," *World Affairs* 175, no. No. 6 (March, 2013).

⁵ Ciara Nugent, "How Doctors Became Cuba's Biggest Export", *Time*, November 30, 2018

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Werlau, *op cit*.

⁸ Amilcar Pérez Riverol Phd, "The Cuban Strategy for Combatting the COVID-19 Pandemic," *MEDICC Review* 22, no. 3 (Jul 01, 2020), 64-68. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2435530059>.

⁹ *Ibid*.

pandemic. It can direct resources to certain sectors such as primary care and the pharmaceutical industry, and it can more readily enforce mandatory measures.

Covid-19 Touches Down

When three Italian tourists were confirmed as the first cases of Covid-19 in Cuba on March 11, 2020, Cuban authorities were quick to react, establishing a National Intersectoral Commission for Covid-19, and the Council of Ministers authorized the Plan for the Prevention and Control of Coronavirus.¹⁰ The healthcare system also sprang into action, conducting door-to-door health checks, testing, contact tracing, and quarantining. Undergraduate medical students were employed for the door-to-door information gathering campaign. The 'lockdown' order was issued on March 20, requiring all to abide by social distancing rules and wear facemasks when leaving homes on essential business. Business taxes and domestic debts were suspended, those hospitalized had 50% of their salaries guaranteed, and low-income households qualified for social assistance and family assistance schemes, with food, medicine, and other goods delivered to their homes. On 24 March, Cuba closed its borders to all non-residents.¹¹

The healthcare system adopted the CARE model to combat Covid-19. It divides people into four groups: the patient is apparently healthy, the patient has risk factors for disease, the patient is ill, and the patient is in recovery or rehabilitation. By May 24, a Cuban population of 11.2 million had reported 82 deaths and fewer than 2,000 confirmed cases; 173 confirmed cases per million people, well below the levels being recorded in Europe and the United States.¹² The CARE Model thus provided comprehensive healthcare, using the Cuban advantage in health administration.

Cuba's pharmaceutical industry was also pressed into service. The United States' embargo has forced Cuba to become more self-sufficient in producing medical drugs.

¹⁰ Magda Luisa Rivera, "Strategic Perspective in the Management of Covid-19 in Cuba,"

<https://www.clacso.org/en/perspectiva-estrategica-en-la-gestion-de-la-covid-19-en-cuba/>

¹¹ Helen Yaffe, "Leading by Example: Cuba in the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Counterpunch*, June 4, 2020,

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/06/04/leading-by-example-cuba-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

¹² *Ibid.*

One product thus produced aimed at Covid-19 control was called Nasalferon, a nasally administered recombinant alpha 2b interferon that acts against viral replication.¹³ Another product was Cuban monoclonal antibody Itolizumab (Anti CD6) to treat seriously ill patients that have Covid-19 and are suffering with pneumonia.¹⁴ A rapid test kit for Covid-19 was also developed.¹⁵

By late-June, the Latin American region accounted for roughly 50% of global daily deaths, but the Cuban situation was largely under control, and after wrestling with the virus for three months, Cuba began to move to the post-pandemic phase.¹⁶ In that three-month period, 2,340 cases (20.7 per 100,000 population) were confirmed, of which 86 patients died (case fatality 3.67%; 52 men and 34 women). Mean age of the deceased was 73.6 years (with a minimum of 35 years and a maximum of 101), with the average age of men slightly lower than that of women. More than 70% of all deceased had associated noncommunicable diseases. The incidence curve ascended for five weeks and then descended steadily.¹⁷

Cuba Develops its own Vaccine

Cuba knew that the American embargo would preclude it from obtaining vaccines produced by American corporations such as Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. Cuba also understood that European vaccine developers would put Europeans ahead of others in vaccine delivery. The special relationship with Russia lives on in memory but is these days fueled by hard currency, and there is no particularly fraternal relationship with capitalist China. Nor did Cuba bother to sign up for the WHO-led Covax dose

¹³ Roberto Cañete MD PhD, Lizbet María León MD MS, and Layvis Rodríguez MD. "An Experience with Cuban Biotech's Nasalferon to Prevent SARS-COV-2 Infections in International Travelers and their Contacts", *MEDICC Review* 22, No. 2, (April 2, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.37757/MR2021.V23.N2.1>

¹⁴ MEDICC Review, "Cuba's Covid-19 Strategy: Updated Epidemic Control and Recovery Measures." *MEDICC Review* 22, no. 3 (Jul, 2020), 5. doi:10.37757/MR2020.V22.N3.3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/32812892>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Pérez Riverol, *op cit.*

¹⁷ Enrique Galbán-García and Pedro Más-Bermejo, "COVID-19 in Cuba: Assessing the National Response", *MEDICC Rev.*, 2020 Oct;22(4):29-34.

sharing initiative, understanding that it would no doubt be placed near the bottom of the list. Accordingly, if Cuba wished to vaccinate its population sufficiently to develop herd immunity, it would have to develop its own vaccine.

In March 2021, Dagmar Garcia Rivera, the research director at the Finlay Vaccine Institute in Havana, announced that one of Cuba's five vaccine candidates, the Soberana 2 (Sovereign 2), appeared to be highly effective and was entering the final stage of clinical trials.¹⁸ If the process goes according to plan, Cuba should have an effective vaccine available in May 2021. That plan will have Cuba vaccinating its own people and then sharing with its friends in the ALBA alliance. Accordingly, vaccine diplomacy will join the medical diplomacy being practiced by Cuba.

The Economy Contracts

Addressing Cuba's parliament in December 2020, Economy Minister Alejandro Gil said the economy shrank by 11% in 2020 due to the pandemic, tougher sanctions imposed by the Trump Administration, and domestic inefficiencies. The Minister noted that "This year, we received just 55% of the hard currency we had planned."¹⁹ The government estimate was even more dire than that of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean which had predicted an 8.5% contraction for Cuba this year, compared to a 7.7% regional decline.²⁰

Cuba imports more than 50% of its fuel and food. It had been part of the Soviet Comecon system whereby the various countries in the Soviet bloc specialized in various lines of production in which they had a comparative advantage and then traded goods among themselves. Cuba grew sugar and coffee and imported much of its foodstuffs from Eastern Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union also saw the Comecon system

¹⁸ Jason Beaubien, "Cuba's Dream: Come For A Vacation, Get A Homegrown COVID Vaccine", *NPR*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/03/25/980789381/cubas-revolutionary-dream-making-its-own-covid-vaccine>

¹⁹ Reuters staff, "Cuban economy shrank 11% in 2020, government says", December 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/cuba-economy/cuban-economy-shrank-11-in-2020-government-says-idUSL1N2IX1V9>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

disintegrate. The resulting crisis of food insecurity was called the Special Period.²¹ The Cuban government responded with a mix of innovation and repression. There were harshly enforced rations but also a blossoming of urban agricultural gardens. Further, the government began leasing fallow state-owned land to prospective farmers in 2008 with about 151,000 people holding leases covering 1.2 million hectares.²² Encouragement of tourism combined with a hesitant embrace of small-scale private enterprise and a more positive attitude towards foreign direct investment, particularly in the tourism sector, combined to refill government coffers.²³ The pandemic jeopardized all these gains. Gil forecasts 6% to 7% growth for 2021 flowing from the reopening of the tourism sector. Successfully managing the pandemic and also developing a vaccine will therefore have an economic dividend. Tourists are likely to return to Cuba's beaches. Havana, which recently celebrated its 500th anniversary, remains an enticing drawcard. There may even be the prospect of vaccine tourism from other parts of the region. And awaiting these tourists are 580,000 self-employed license holders, including cab drivers, tradesmen, and the employees of thousands of private eateries, bed and breakfasts, and construction contractors.²⁴

But the fundamental question about the economy remains – is it to be true to Fidel's notions of socialism or will the private sector be allowed to grow and thus grow the economy? Raul Castro has vacillated over this key question, invariably taking at least one step back for each two steps forward. Fidel Castro called his brother's reforms "concessions to the enemy".²⁵ For example, the green light to certain constricted forms of private enterprise was accompanied by a ban on "accumulation of wealth."²⁶ And the agriculture reform from 2010, including loosening regulations on farmers to favor market

²¹ Ted Henken (2008) *Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook*. ABC-CLIO.

²² Marc Frank, "Explainer: The state of Raul Castro's economic reforms in Cuba", April 17, 2018, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-politics-castro-changes-explaine/explainer-the-state-of-raul-castros-economic-reforms-in-cuba-idUSKBN1HO0CL>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Reuters Staff, *op cit.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

forces and prices, was reversed in 2015 and the state dominated system restored on the grounds that speculation was inflating prices.²⁷

The dilemma is ultimately more political than economic. Economic independence will foster political independence. The Communist Party of Cuba remains resolutely Leninist. The China model is available, but Cuba seems to fear its implications. All those Chinese private sector billionaires are anathema to Cuba! And geography favors Cuba. The country is small enough to control by traditional police and domestic intelligence means, something the Cuban government is comfortable with and competent at. And in clinging to Leninism, Cuba has a formidable ally – the United States embargo. Has there ever been a policy that more obviously achieves the opposite of its intentions? The embargo was intended to undermine the Castro regime, instead it legitimizes it. Any setback, any downturn, any slip-up can simply be blamed on the embargo. It is the all-purpose explanation for all the negatives in Cuban society. Lifting the embargo would empower the Cuban people to demand far more from their government.

Civil Rights

Leninism is not part of the established formula for the protection of human rights. That formula requires democracy and the rule of law. Neither is available in Cuba. Protest is rare in Cuba as protesters are likely to encounter the criminal justice system. There were sporadic protests during the Special Period, but the regime was able to ride this out and over the course of the following decade restore a level of growth in the economy and hope in the people. But not all Cubans are prepared simply to accept whatever the government says and decides. Pockets of contestation remain, and they are invariably treated harshly:

Human Rights Watch documented cases involving 34 victims in which authorities invoked rules concerning the Covid-19 pandemic to target government critics and others. Of 20 arrested, 3 were arbitrarily prosecuted, 3 others were fined, and 14

²⁷ *Ibid.*

more were threatened with prosecution for ‘spreading an epidemic.’ Eight who were not arrested were fined under Covid-19 rules in ways that appeared arbitrary, and two others were threatened with prosecution.²⁸

There was also a significant protest during the Covid-19 period. Under the private sector liberalization process, private art galleries were allowed to operate. They were relatively successful in attracting tourist dollars but, as noted, economic independence fosters political independence, and in this case, artistic independence. This became intolerable for the Leninist government, and it adopted Decree 349 under which all persons engaged in artistic activities, including artistic groups, who engage in music and performance, are prohibited from developing such activities in public or private spaces without the prior approval of the Ministry of Culture.²⁹ The arrest of rapper Denis Solís González under Decree 349 sparked the Cuban artistic community into protest. In November 2020, a crowd of around 300 artists, intellectuals, and activists gathered outside the Ministry of Culture to protest against the lack of free expression and demand the liberation of the imprisoned rapper.³⁰

The Response Strategy

Cuba was able to institute early and timely implementation of Covid-19 mitigation and or suppression measures such as the robust and ubiquitous ARI block by block canvassing to ensure early detection of early cases. Thorough contact tracing was undertaken, coupled with the swift isolation of confirmed cases as well as people who were in contact with said individuals. Finally, Cuba had a rational testing program.³¹ The effectiveness of the mitigation and suppression measures is quantified

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Cuba: Covid-19 Rules Used to Intensify Repression”, December 7, 2020 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/07/cuba-covid-19-rules-used-intensify-repression#>

²⁹ Amnesty International, “Cuba: Decree 349 of the new administration augurs a dystopian artistic world in Cuba”, 24 August 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2018/08/cuba-new-administrations-decree-349-is-a-dystopian-prospect-for-cubas-artists/>

³⁰ James Bloodworth, “Pandemic Crisis Drives Cubans to Rare, Risky Protest,” *Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/12/04/coronavirus-pandemic-cuba-protests-free-expression-denis-solis-gonzalez/>

³¹ Pérez Riverol, *op cit.*

by the Oxford Stringency Index. Cuba rates at 83.3 on a 0–100 scale that correlated to nine response indicators including but not limited to travel bans, school closures, and workplace closures.³² The non-pharmaceutical mitigation suppression measures that were instituted include restriction of internal movement; limited the use of public transportation, public events, and gatherings; and it even went as far as a complete travel ban.

Surveillance and Contact Tracing

The healthcare system and the health care education apparatus were effectively deployed.³³ The surveillance objective was to detect suspected cases to determine whether to recommend home isolation. The monitoring was implemented in a prescribed and focused manner targeting those that had contact with confirmed cases. The basic reproductive number (RO) of the virus is a metric that was able to be kept low through contact tracing and isolation measures.³⁴ The success of the massive surveillance effort is due to the efficiency and organization of the Ministry of Public Health, which according to specific function 2 and 4, has the job of: “Regulating and controlling the course of the health professions...”³⁵ and “Working in the regulation, control and sanitary surveillance about the different causes that influence negatively and could affect the human resources for the Public Health.”³⁶ Surveillance of foreigners was included in the efforts to track potential spread of the virus.

Molecular Diagnosis of SARs-Cov-2

Mass surveillance and rapid isolation’s effectiveness was augmented with molecular diagnostics to identify asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic patients that could unknowingly be vectors of the virus. Following World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, Cuba transformed its laboratory capacity to be able to undertake

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Pérez Riverol, *op cit.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

molecular diagnosis of the SARs-CoV-2. Cuba also developed its own molecular diagnostic tests as an alternative to the RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) test. The RT-PCR has been the standard for detecting Covid-19, yet it is cost prohibitive for Cuba. The Cuban government thus demonstrated the strength of its pharmaceutical industry while also abiding by WHO recommendations.

Methods used to Contend with the Virus

Cuban authorities formed a Technical Advisory Team made up of biomedical specialists and social scientists to observe, analyze, and bring feedback to the policy makers.³⁷ Prognostic models were crucial for forecasting the course of the epidemic. The Susceptible Infected-Recovered (SIR) Model was implemented to show three possible scenarios: favorable, moderate, or critical.³⁸ Ultimately, Cuba fared better than the favorable projections produced by the University of Havana.

Using strengths and ingenuity

It is often said that necessity is the mother of invention; Cuba not only makes its own molecular diagnosis test but is also developing its own vaccine. Taking extreme ownership of the situation, Cuba did not wait for foreign pharmaceuticals to save them with a vaccine and instead, the Finlay Institute of Vaccines developed the Soberano 02.³⁹ Dr. Bencomo from the Finlay Institute emphasizes that, unlike large pharmaceutical corporations, the Cuban vaccines are developed with the goal of saving lives first and if they can make a profit in the process, then so be it. The Finlay Institute project is making more the 100 million does in 2021, with only a fraction of it used to fully immunize Cuba.⁴⁰ Phase 3 clinical testing of the Soberna 02 and Abdala vaccines started as recently as March 3, 2021. Dr. Moya, a health expert that works for the World Health Organization

³⁷ Galbán-García and Más-Bermejo, *op cit.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Marianne Guenot, "Cuba is Working on a Homegrown COVID-19 Vaccine Program. it has a History of Fighting Disease without Help from the West," Newstex LLC, <https://www.businessinsider.com/cuba-homegrown-vaccine-program-pressing-on-without-the-west-2021-2>

⁴⁰ Will Grant, "Optimism as Cuba Set to Test its Own Covid Vaccine," *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56069577>

and the Pan American Health Organization, notes that Cuban vaccine researchers are abiding by the international protocol.⁴¹

Economic Response

The Cuban government is devaluing its peso while phasing out a currency. The CUP (Cuban Peso) was created by Che Guevara and is primarily used in domestic transactions. The CUC was created after the US dollar was banned in 2004, thus it is used for buying good from abroad and for state business. The Cuban government's currency unification plan means the Cuban peso will be allowed to fluctuate instead of staying at a fixed rate. The union of the two currencies has caused food prices to rise for Cubans, already hurting from the ramification of a contracting economy.

Tourism Under Any Other Name

Cuban authorities are doubling down on Covid mitigation measures, requiring tourists to isolate on their own dime while they wait for negative test results for the new strains of the coronavirus. Cuba had strict isolation and negative test requirements initially, but once Cuba seemed to be out of the woods, the government eased restrictions in November 2020, resulting in a slight rise in infections. The new coronavirus tests are required to be administered on the 5th day of isolation.

Misinformation In an Epidemic Environment

Websites can collect information from various reliable sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) and publish them. Misinformation is not a problem that is exclusive to United States elections, but unfortunately affects Cuba as well. The overabundant access to information via the internet can cause confusion. The sheer volume of information can make fact-checking a challenge. Education on strategies to confirm veracity of information is a universal response to misinformation. Specifically,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Cuba's Juventud Técnica (JT) or Technical Youth has launched a project to debunk misinformation. The Covid-19 information that JT verifies has life or death implications as misinformation can lead to an inherently faulty decision-making process.

Cuba in Comparison

How did other Caribbean countries cope with the Covid epidemic? The Dominican Republic requested and was granted a \$650m loan from the International Monetary Fund, to support its efforts in the implementation of emergency measures to contain the spread and to lessen the impact of the pandemic.⁴² This is not an option open to Cuba. The Jamaican government, which also relies heavily on tourism, instituted curfews and set limits on the size of gatherings. Masks were mandated in public places and travelers from the United States, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Panama were required to have a negative test before checking-in for a flight into Jamaica. Upon arrival, a composite health and risk assessment was conducted to monitor for signs of Covid-19 symptoms. Like Cuba, Jamaica deployed strategies for suppression transmission, and enhanced the laboratory capabilities. Jamaica had a curfew, from 9:00pm until 5:00am, for 11 days from October 20 until October 31 of 2020. Public gatherings were limited to fifteen people with social distancing of six feet. But while Cuba was lifting restrictions, Jamaica was tightening them.⁴³

Clearly Cuba performed best among the Caribbean cohort. The American territory of Puerto Rico, has one quarter of Cuba's population but with 60 times more cases and 30 times more deaths, probably performed the worst.⁴⁴ Not only was Cuba better at the day-to-day management of prevention measures, but it was able to take proactive steps to

⁴² IMF, "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$650 Million in Emergency Assistance to the Dominican Republic to address the COVID-19 Pandemic", April 29, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/30/pr-20195-dominican-republic-imf-executive-board-approves-us-650-million-in-emergency-assistance>

⁴³ GardaWorld, "Jamaica: Authorities to tighten nightly curfew nationwide April 17-May 8 /update 25", 14 April 2020, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/466851/jamaica-authorities-to-tighten-nightly-curfew-nationwide-april-17-may-8-update-25>

⁴⁴ World Health Organisation, "Puerto Rico Situation", <https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/pr>

develop vaccines. Cuba will now employ this success as propaganda in favor of its system of governance, both at home and abroad.

Conclusions

At first blush, the Cuban case seems to argue in favor of the autocratic advantage in dealing with an emergency such as a pandemic. A one-party system that brooks no dissent was able to take urgent measures to control community transmission and deal with morbidity factors. Cuba's success needs to be acknowledged, and indeed celebrated, but it may not be appropriate to leap to the conclusion that its autocracy also requires praise. Cuba's success flows from many factors. Geography is key. As an island nation, Cuba was able quickly to lock itself off from the rest of the world and then concentrate on community transmission on the island. History is also important. Cuba serendipitously developed a unique niche for itself as a generator of medical expertise which it then turned into an export industry. Other countries have similar niches. The Philippines produces many nurses who work throughout the world. But Filipino nurses need to fend for themselves in securing employment abroad. The Cuban system is government-run. As noted, Brazilian President Bolsonaro called Cuban doctors "slave labor",⁴⁵ and this is the terminology that some Cuban doctors adopted in seeking to improve their economic lot by bringing a case before Brazilian courts to free themselves from their onerous obligation to pass most of their salaries back to the Cuban government.⁴⁶ The government-run nature of the Cuban medical system may therefore have its negatives, but when it came time to deal with a pandemic at home, it also had many positives.

The net result of the speedy and effective interventions by the Cuban government is that the Cuban health care system is trusted by the citizenry. Cuban leaders may not be elected, but they are nevertheless judged against performance. This produces its own

⁴⁵ Shasta Darlington, "Cuba Is Pulling Doctors from Brazil After 'Derogatory' Comments by Bolsonaro", *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 2018

⁴⁶ Ernesto Londoño, "Cuban Doctors Revolt: 'You Get Tired of Being a Slave'", *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 2017

type of legitimacy and trust also leads to voluntary compliance with government guidelines set out Ministry of Public Health. Cuba did not even have to engage in overt propaganda to sell its performance, it was obvious to one and all that the system had functioned as well as could have been expected. And if anything goes wrong, Cuba can always rely on its one-size-fits-all excuse of the American embargo. Ultimately, the Cuban case must be seen as *sui generis*. A constellation of factors allowed it to succeed in taming Covid-19 on Cuban soil.

Chapter 5

**FEDERALISM, THE EU, AND HUMAN RIGHTS
IN GERMANY UNDER COVID-19**

Camilla Bober

Spread of coronavirus, reactions, and vaccination policy

The novel coronavirus (Covid-19) has illuminated the two sides of emergency planning and response in Germany: one of strict organization and adaptability, and one hampered by political processes and discontinuity amongst the German Länder (states). Despite many challenges, Germany has gingerly attempted to balance public health management with democratic preservation. Germany's federal system has led to general legal frameworks at the national level while coordinating with sixteen Länder governments which have significant input into lawmaking while implementing federal laws.¹ This federal democratic system must also coordinate with supranational governance as Germany is part of the European Union (EU). Despite Europe's concept of subsidiarity, Covid-19 has tested the division of responsibilities, and civilian involvement has decreased with EU attempts to coordinate and, at times, act on behalf of Member States.² These influences from the bottom and from the top affected Germany's Covid-19 response throughout 2020 and early 2021, exacerbating current democratic challenges in the nation.

¹ Johannes Saurer, "COVID-19 and Cooperative Administrative Federalism in Germany", *The Regulatory Review*, May 13, 2020. <https://www.theregreview.org/2020/05/13/saurer-covid-19-cooperative-administrative-federalism-germany/>

² Alberto Alemanno, "Coronavirus and Europe's Incomplete Union", *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2020. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-europe-s-incomplete-union-pub-82111>

Policy foundations and the first wave

Germany was among the first countries in Europe to experience human-to-human Covid-19 transmission, with the country's first wave starting at the end of January 2020.³ The transmission occurred between work colleagues in Bavaria,⁴ which held local elections later in 2020.⁵ German health ministers expressed confidence in their ability to manage the disease and set up a hotline for people in Bavaria, promoting access to information and encouraging transparency.⁶ However, the government did not fully communicate the seriousness of the virus with the German people until late February, when it ordered a lockdown.⁷ The first coronavirus deaths in Germany occurred in early March, by which time, Germany had over 1,100 confirmed cases of Covid-19.⁸ The federal system in Germany established to vastly different social distancing and lockdown measures, creating frustration, confusion,⁹ and, as shown by cell phone data, even limited compliance with travel restrictions.¹⁰ It also created disorganization in access to information with different disease parameters not reported in a timely fashion.¹¹

In February 2020, the Chinese embassy in Germany criticized the German media for racist, anti-Asian statements in relation to Covid-19. The embassy noted that freedom

³ Deutsche Welle, "Germany confirms human transmission of coronavirus", *Deutsche Welle*, January 28, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-confirms-human-transmission-of-coronavirus/a-52169007>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Armend Bekaj and Alberto Fernández Gibaja. Issue brief. *The Global State of Democracy In Focus: Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Europe Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, January 2021. 20. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/regional-democratic-trends-europe-before-and-during-COVID-19.pdf>.

⁶ *Deutsche Welle* (28 January 2020), *op. cit.*

⁷ Michael Meyer-Resende, "The Myth of German Coronavirus Exceptionalism", *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2020. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/myth-of-german-coronavirus-exceptionalism-pub-82116>

⁸ Matthias Inverardi and Michael Nienaber, "Germany, with over 1,100 cases, reports first two coronavirus deaths", *Reuters*, March 9, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-death/germany-reports-first-death-cases-due-to-coronavirus-idUSKBN20W295>

⁹ Philip Oltermann, "Germany's devolved logic is helping it win the coronavirus race", *The Guardian*, April 5, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/germanys-devolved-logic-is-helping-it-win-the-coronavirus-race>

¹⁰ Meyer-Resende, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

of the press does not equate to freedom of hate speech and promotion of racism.¹² While commending the general German population for opposing such racist comments, the embassy's statement calls on Germans to be anti-racist.¹³ This early statement examining the relationship between racism and Covid-19 is one example of how racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia spread throughout the nation through Covid-related conspiracy theories during 2020.¹⁴

By April 2020, freedom of speech and assembly took to the Internet in a striking form of online protest and mobilization. The virtual "Blanke Bedenken" ("Naked Qualms") protest consisted of German doctors posing naked in photos to highlight the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff - leaving healthcare professionals essentially "naked" and exposed to Covid-19.¹⁵ Critiquing unmet demands, theft, regional discrepancies in PPE, and a lack of fair prices, Germany's protesting doctors attracted the attention of the press created a situation where the government had little option but to respond to these policy demands.¹⁶

There were other lockdown-related protests as well in April 2020. Germany allowed protests but required that they adhere to social distancing protocols.¹⁷ Despite this, about 1,000 protesters¹⁸ distributed pamphlets declaring that the government's

¹² Botschaft der Volksrepublik China in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Stellungnahme der chinesischen Botschaft zu rassistischen Äußerungen in einzelnen deutschen Medien", Bekämpfung COVID-19, Botschaft der Volksrepublik China in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, February 5, 2020. <http://de.china-embassy.org/det/zt/BekaempfungCOVID19/t1740309.htm>

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Hans Pfeifer, "Conspiracy theories during coronavirus pandemic in Europe", *Deutsche Welle*, February 18, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/conspiracy-theories-during-coronavirus-pandemic-in-europe/a-56617752>

¹⁵ Kate Connolly, "German doctors pose naked in protest at PPE shortages", *The Guardian*, April 27, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/27/german-doctors-pose-naked-in-protest-at-ppe-shortages>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The Straits Times, "I want my life back': Germans protest against coronavirus lockdown", *The Straits Times*, April 26, 2020. <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/i-want-my-life-back-germans-protest-against-coronavirus-lockdown>

¹⁸ Deutsche Welle, "German conspiracists protest against coronavirus lockdown", *Deutsche Welle*, April 25, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-conspiracists-protest-against-coronavirus-lockdown/a-53243126>

lockdown is repressing democracy.¹⁹ Some protestors included conspiracy theorists and groups such as "Querdenken,"²⁰ (outside-the-box thinkers), that promote hatred.²¹ Others protested against mask and distancing mandates, calling them anti-democratic.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), the central national body that focuses on disease control,²² monitors the reproduction rate ("R") of coronavirus, with an R score of 1.0 indicating an individual passing Covid-19 to another single individual.²³ In May 2020, the German government did not express significant concern over rates higher than 1.0, stating that these rates predominantly came from "hot spots" like meatpacking industries. To them, it did not indicate the general trend of coronavirus spread in the country as a whole, which was seen as manageable especially with mass testing schemes underway.²⁴ Importantly, the workers who contracted the coronavirus at such high rates in meatpacking plants are predominantly Eastern European immigrants, often working under poor conditions as subcontractors and living in crowded communal settings.²⁵ The government's complacency over the plight of meatpacking workers is indicative of a longer-term problem of compromised rights for foreign workers.²⁶

Despite challenges surrounding inconsistent management and information transparency, Germany has generally been praised for being an example of how democracies can achieve solid public responses to Covid-19 by building confidence in leadership and faith in science. The first wave is the primary source for such praise. By

¹⁹ The Straits Times, "I want my life back", *op. cit.*

²⁰ Deutsche Welle, "German conspiracists", *op. cit.*

²¹ BBC News, "Berlin Covid protest broken up near Brandenburg Gate", *BBC*, November 18, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54985622>

²² Jens Thurau, "How COVID changed Germany, one year on", *Deutsche Welle*, January 27, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-covid-changed-germany-one-year-on/a-56350430>

²³ "Coronavirus: Germany not alarmed by infection rate rise", *BBC*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52632369>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bojan Pancevski, "Germany Moves to Clean Up Meat Industry Amid Coronavirus Surge", *The Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-moves-to-clean-up-meat-industry-amid-coronavirus-surge-11589981736?page=1>

²⁶ Derek Scally, "Coronavirus: How Germany dealt with a meat plant outbreak", *The Irish Times*, August 13, 2020. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/coronavirus-how-germany-dealt-with-a-meat-plant-outbreak-1.4328602>

March 2020, the whole country was under lockdown.²⁷ Local government districts also showed success as Berlin established a 500-bed hospital within a few weeks.²⁸ The country set up a mass testing scheme early on, the federal system on this occasion being an advantage.²⁹ With hundreds of decentralized, municipal public health offices, tests were able to reach more laboratories and accommodate more individuals,³⁰ who possibly would have had issues accessing tests in geographically remote areas should the system have been run at the national level. The country was able to re-open with relatively few cases by April and May.³¹ The second wave, however, presented even greater management challenges within the federal and European contexts.

The second wave

The second wave of coronavirus in Germany, beginning around August 2020, was not met with an improved response and resilience from the government despite having had more time and knowledge to prepare for it. In keeping with the problems of the meatpacking industry in the first wave, by the start of the second wave, the largest meat plant in Germany, the Tönnies plant in Westphalia, had an outbreak, impacting about 14,000 people through infection, quarantine, or both.³² There was significant public outrage. Community disappointment and anger led to the proposal of new laws to protect meatpacking workers' rights, a stark contrast to the complacency of previous years.³³ The proposals include a ban on subcontracting in the industry and greater oversight of working conditions.³⁴ At the same time, farmers struggled to sell products and people worried for their loved ones in at-risk groups.³⁵ The coronavirus outbreak in

²⁷ Anna Sauerbrey, "How Germany Lost Control of the Virus", Opinion, *The New York Times*, February 11, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/opinion/germany-covid-second-wave.html>

²⁸ Meyer-Resende, *op. cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Oltermann, April 5, 2020, *op. cit.*

³¹ Sauerbrey, *op. cit.*

³² Scally, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Pancevski, *op. cit.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Germany demonstrates the intertwined nature of democracy, economy, securing human rights, and public health management in policy and implementation.

The second wave's major demographic of infections was young people.³⁶ While deaths and hospitalizations were not as high and during the first wave, there was still anxiety that schools would be forced to close again, and that the elderly would be infected from younger family and friends.³⁷ Throughout the summer, the country slowly reopened while maintaining rules such as mask-wearing.³⁸ Limitations on gatherings varied across different German Länder, some even allowing groups in the hundreds.³⁹ Intra-European travel recommenced and the RKI attributed 40% of new coronavirus infections to said travel.⁴⁰ Once again, frustration set in across the country especially amongst small business owners and healthcare staff as the government refused to close the borders.⁴¹ Germany went under lockdown for a second time by mid-November, again at a much slower pace than at the start of the first wave of infections.⁴²

Groups took the streets again in protest⁴³ in October and November 2020.⁴⁴ Maskless protestors mobilized through "Querdenken", anti-vaccination groups, and far-right groups multiple times in the fall.⁴⁵ The groups denied the impacts of coronavirus and police used water cannons on some groups to break up the protests.⁴⁶ Some protestors donned Nazi sympathizer apparel and even compared the lockdowns to fascism and

³⁶ Chris Bryant, "Did Europe Make a Mistake Reopening Its Borders?", *Bloomberg*, August 24, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-08-24/coronavirus-why-germany-is-struggling-to-stop-the-new-covid-spike>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Jens Thurau, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Bryant, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Jens Thurau, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Deutsche Welle, "Germany: Thousands protest against COVID-19 rules in Berlin", *Deutsche Welle*, October 25, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-thousands-protest-against-covid-19-rules-in-berlin/a-55392704>

⁴⁴ BBC News, "Berlin Covid protest broken up", *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

masks to “Merkel’s muzzle”.⁴⁷ In November, an explosive device with a note calling for the end of coronavirus restrictions was detonated next to the German scientific institutions, and the RKI was hit with Molotov cocktails.⁴⁸ Such protests present a clear threat to human rights and to democracy. Hate crimes and far-right activism have been on the rise in Germany in the last few years.⁴⁹ Coronavirus-related protests added fuel to this process.⁵⁰

A new variant of the coronavirus, known colloquially as the “British variant”, spread to Germany in late December, a few days before Christmas.⁵¹ This mutation creates a more transmissible version of the virus that also replicates much faster than the original variant.⁵² By February 2021, this B117 variant was tied to over 20% of Germany’s cases and led to limits of two households in gatherings, the closure of nonessential businesses, and border restrictions with other EU countries, clearly at odds with the mid-2020’s discourse surrounding the importance of maintaining open borders and intra-European travel.⁵³ Germany is introducing free antigen testing for all German residents starting in March 2021.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Aljazeera, “Thousands of Germans protest against Merkel’s coronavirus plans”, *Al Jazeera*, November 18, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/18/thousands-of-germans-protest-against-merkels-coronavirus-plans>

⁴⁸ Loveday Morris and Luisa Beck, “Germany’s protests against coronavirus restrictions are becoming increasingly radical”, *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/germany-coronavirus-lockdown-protests/2020/11/12/3e9879ea-2422-11eb-9c4a-0dc6242c4814_story.html

⁴⁹ Daily Sabah with Wires, “Car attack in Germany reveals growing hatred, xenophobia”, *Daily Sabah*, January 3, 2019. <https://www.dailysabah.com/europe/2019/01/03/car-attack-in-germany-reveals-growing-hatred-xenophobia>

⁵⁰ J.E.W., “EDITORIAL: Minority Right Vs. Majority Might.” *A Journal of Church and State* 5 (1): 5–14. 1963. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/5.1.5>.

⁵¹ Ludwig Burger, “Germany reports first case of coronavirus variant spreading in Britain”, *Reuters*, December 24, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-variant-idUSKBN28Y1LO>

⁵² Richard Gray, “This is how new Covid-19 variants are changing the pandemic”, *BBC Future*, January 27, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210127-covid-19-variants-how-mutations-are-changing-the-pandemic>

⁵³ Deutsche Welle, “COVID: UK variant spreading rapidly in Germany”, *Deutsche Welle*, February 17, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-uk-variant-spreading-rapidly-in-germany/a-56597463>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Prospects for 2021: Vaccine distribution and criticisms of EU-tied initiatives

The EU's coordinated vaccination scheme has turned into a test of the organization's competence. Germany and the EU Commission argued that if it did not take charge, the poorer EU members would have less vaccine access.⁵⁵ Success in this endeavor would go some way in putting balm on some of its Brexit wounds; Germany has a key political stake in this situation as it is the *de facto* leader of the EU.

The primary vaccine source for the EU is from AstraZeneca, a British-Swedish company.⁵⁶ Compared to the speedy work of the United Kingdom (UK), the EU experienced painful delays in finalizing its supplier contract.⁵⁷ The EU purchasing agreement with AstraZeneca stipulates that the primary manufacturing site for EU-destined vaccines would be in the UK, supported by sites in the Netherlands and Belgium.⁵⁸ When AstraZeneca reported that it would not be able to fulfill its supply commitments to the EU, but would generally meet its commitments to the UK, tensions fired up as old wounds surrounding Brexit re-opened.⁵⁹

Germany supported the EU responsibility for acquiring vaccines and was open to prioritizing distribution to less wealthy EU states, citing Germany's reduced need because of its (then) low infection rates.⁶⁰ However, this led to a nationalist pushback amongst the public. Germany's Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has not been widely available to Germans, but has had more uptake in the UK and other countries.⁶¹ Germany even had to pause vaccine distributions for a short time.⁶² By February 2021 only 4% of

⁵⁵ Damien McGuinness, "Covid: Vaccine tensions stoke German criticism of EU's von der Leyen", *BBC*, February 6, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55948360>

⁵⁶ Angela Dewan, "A fight between the EU and UK reveals the ugly truth about vaccine nationalism", *CNN*, January 30, 2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/30/europe/uk-eu-astrazeneca-vaccine-nationalism-gbr-intl/index.html>

⁵⁷ Sauerbrey, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ BBC News, "Coronavirus: EU demands UK-made AstraZeneca vaccine doses", *BBC*, January 27, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55822602>

⁵⁹ Dewan, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ McGuinness, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Dewan, *op. cit.*

Germans had been vaccinated.⁶³ This adds up to about 3 million compared to the UK's 11 million vaccinations.⁶⁴ In the same month, the BBC reported that a public opinion poll indicating Germans' approval for the country's handling of the pandemic had fallen from 80% to 50%.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the decision to entrust the EU Commission with this task is a testament to regional solidarity. The short-term problems of managing the process may yet be rewarded with longer term benefits if EU nations ultimately see the process as demonstrating the depth of their Union.

Negotiating between local, national, and regional politics

Public health issues are prone to be politicized; this is further accentuated in a pandemic. Germany's federal system decentralized many emergency management regulations. The central legal framework for such decentralization is the Infektionsschutzgesetz (Infection Protection Act - IfSG).⁶⁶ State governments, under this law, have significant power to issue regulations and can put forth broad decrees as part of "general" regulations.⁶⁷ Saurer notes that Germany's federal system demonstrates two different types of governance: administrative federalism, where German states implement administrative aspects of federal legislation, and cooperative federalism, wherein state governments influence federal legislation.⁶⁸ Early regulations giving significant power to the federal health ministry attracted controversy, especially considering German political history of the anti-democratic misuse of state power.⁶⁹ The judicial branch emphasizes a checks and balances approach when hearing hundreds of

⁶³ Sauerbrey, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ McGuinness, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Saurer, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Markus Siewert and Wurster, Stefan and Messerschmidt, Luca and Cheng, Cindy and Buthe, Tim, A German Miracle? Crisis Management During the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Multi-Level System (June 25, 2020). In: Inacio, Magna & Aline Burni (eds.). *PEX Special Report: Coronavirus Outbreak, Presidents' Responses, and Institutional Consequences* (2020), 3. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3637013> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3637013>

cases regarding such government regulations and democratic freedoms.⁷⁰ But there were few decisions against state regulations surrounding challenges to physical distancing as a breach of democratic rights.⁷¹

There have been both benefits and drawbacks of managing the coronavirus under federalism. The system worked cohesively at the start with all 16 states adopting similar regulations, but by May 2020, many Länder started adjusting their rules to suit local conditions.⁷² A federal system has the strength of setting a broad national direction but allowing changes in approaches based on local need to be more effective. For example, in Bavaria, the local government passed rules that went beyond the federal requirements.⁷³ However, there were barriers to coronavirus mitigation due to political navigation of regulatory responsibility. For example, in November 2020, Germany entered a “lockdown light”, so nicknamed because of the loose social distancing restrictions. Although Chancellor Merkel preferred a harder lockdown, without the unanimous support of the Länder, she did not have the political capital to enforce stricter measures despite the wave of coronavirus.⁷⁴ The different geographic and social constructs of each Länder led to this weakened result as more sparsely populated areas were less open to the harsher lockdown.⁷⁵ Interestingly, some of state leaders opposing the lockdown would later become political contenders for the role of Chancellor.⁷⁶

EU politics arguably played as large a role as federal politics in balancing Covid-19 decisions. German leadership of the EU provides economic and geopolitical dividends but balancing the overlapping democratic will of both EU and German citizens is a tricky

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷³ Bekaj and Fernández Gibaja. *op. cit.* 20.

⁷⁴ Philip Oltermann, “Merkel forced to postpone plans to tighten lockdown rules”, *The Guardian*, November 16, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/16/merkel-germany-soft-covid-lockdown-chancellor-social-interaction>

⁷⁵ Mark Hallam, “Coronavirus in Germany: How the federal system hampers the fight against the pandemic”, *Deutsche Welle*, October 12, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-in-germany-how-the-federal-system-hampers-the-fight-against-the-pandemic/a-55241135>

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

task. The fate of the EU is at play and Chancellor Merkel took decisions favoring EU coherence over her own personal popularity at home.⁷⁷ One example of EU solidarity is the international collaboration between Germany and France to design a recovery fund for the entire EU, but in particular for less wealthy EU countries.⁷⁸ German officials took greater responsibility for testing people arriving from high-risk areas, so as to keep open the European Schengen zone.⁷⁹

The European Commission had closed all Schengen area borders with unanimous approval in March 2020, but this regulation lasted only thirty days.⁸⁰ Thereafter, much of the decision making regarding international travel was left to European governments rather than the EU. The intergovernmental group focused more on other Covid-19 policies. However, the EU, in 2021, did call on six countries, including Germany, to lift their tight restrictions.⁸¹ The EU put forward a “Temporary Framework” to guide economic policies so members would have a level playing field in economic recovery regardless of national wealth.⁸² It proposes items such as grants, tax advantages, loan guarantees, and subsidized interest rates.⁸³ This guided the design of Germany’s “umbrella scheme” to catalyze economic stimulus.⁸⁴ It provided assistance to vulnerable

⁷⁷ Steven Erlanger, “One Crisis Too Many: How the Coronavirus Pushed Germany to Shift Course”, *The New York Times*, updated July 16, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/world/europe/coronavirus-germany-merkel-france.html>

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Wesley Rahn, “Coronavirus: German officials say EU internal borders should stay open”, *Deutsche Welle*, July 28, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-german-officials-say-eu-internal-borders-should-stay-open/a-54358391>

⁸⁰ Schengen Visa Info News, “BREAKING: EU Decides to Close All Schengen Borders For 30 Days”, Schengen Visa Info News, March 17, 2020. <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/breaking-eu-decides-to-close-all-schengen-borders-for-30-days/>

⁸¹ Daniel Boffey, “EU tells six countries to lift Covid border restrictions”, *The Guardian*, February 23, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/23/eu-tells-six-countries-to-lift-covid-border-restrictions>

⁸² European Commission, “Communication from the Commission Temporary Framework for State aid measures to support the economy in the current COVID-19 outbreak 2020/C 91 I/01”, EUR-Lex, March 20, 2020. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2020_091_I_0001

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ European Commission, “State aid: Commission approves German guarantee measure to further support economy in coronavirus outbreak”, Press release, European Commission, March 24, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_517

groups⁸⁵ as well as Covid-related research and development.⁸⁶ The German framework was amended a month later to adapt to EU amendments⁸⁷ surrounding research and development and employment schemes,⁸⁸ emphasizing the complexities of governance on a continental scale. The German economic framework also emphasized the *Kurzarbeit*, or a short-term work scheme.⁸⁹ Workers' hours were cut in companies facing economic hardship, but the workers themselves still receive most of their wages with the government paying the difference.⁹⁰ Workers, therefore, are not laid off and can return to work when possible.⁹¹ By April 2020, around half a million companies had applied for *Kurzarbeit*.⁹² A second stimulus in May 2020 included investments in electric cars, which is part of the government's green goals to encourage automotive industry to produce electric cars.⁹³

Political contention shortly before the second wave brought this umbrella scheme to the forefront of debate.⁹⁴ While Germans savings increased by more than €100 billion,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ European Commission, "State aid: Commission approves German 'umbrella' scheme to support research, development, testing and production of coronavirus relevant products", Press release, European Commission, April 29, 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_774

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ European Commission, Rep. *Communication from The Commission: Amendment to the Temporary Framework for State Aid Measures to Support the Economy in the Current COVID-19 Outbreak*. European Commission, April 3, 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/sa_covid19_1st_amendment_temporary_framework_en.pdf.

⁸⁹ Arthur Sullivan, "Short-time work: A vital tool in Germany's economic armory against coronavirus", *Deutsche Welle*, March 3, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/short-time-work-a-vital-tool-in-germanys-economic-armory-against-coronavirus/a-52952657>

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Rob Schmitz, "Nearly Half a Million Companies In Germany File for State Funds to Pay Workers", *NPR*, April 1, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/01/825163403/nearly-half-a-million-companies-in-germany-file-for-state-funds-to-pay-workers>

⁹³ Bojan Pancevski and William Boston, "Germany's Second Coronavirus Stimulus Package Brings Total Support to €1.3 Trillion", *The Wall Street Journal*, Updated June 3, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/germanys-second-coronavirus-stimulus-package-brings-total-support-to-1-3-trillion-11591226131>

⁹⁴ Nik Martin, "Coronavirus: How Germany's economy would cope with a second wave", *Deutsche Welle*, July 22, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-stimulus-germany-second-wave/a-54264686>

residents did not consume as much because of the lockdowns, so businesses have been hard hit.⁹⁵ By the second wave, the related stimulus packages were also large and in line with the EU Temporary Framework.⁹⁶ November's 14 billion Euro package provided aid to companies and self-employed individuals, amongst other groups.⁹⁷ In the same month, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz announced the increased net borrowing for 2021 within the budget and the government waived a constitutional cap on deficits because of the emergency.⁹⁸ The Federal Ministry of Finance shared an interactive website in plain language explaining how the German stimulus packages benefit everyday citizens, companies, and local authorities while investing in a green future, healthcare, and technology.⁹⁹ While this can increase trust, the availability of this website in only two languages (English and German) hindered accessibility.

Elections have had positive and negative impacts on coronavirus emergency management within Germany. The local elections in the state of Bavaria demonstrated the democratic strengths of federal systems and highlighted problem-solving to promote access to voting. In March 2020, during the first wave of coronavirus, Bavaria held two rounds of voting.¹⁰⁰ The first one on March 15 had a mix of in-person and mail-in voting.¹⁰¹ The second round was conducted completely through mail.¹⁰² The mail-in-only system was efficient, with multi-party communication to establish the rules and with the creation of a partnership with Deutsche Post to ensure votes are received as priority

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ European Commission, "State aid: Commission approves German "umbrella" scheme to support uncovered fixed costs of companies affected by coronavirus outbreak", Press Release, European Commission, November 20, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2180

⁹⁷ Reuters Staff, "Germany's November coronavirus aid package will cost 14 bln euros - Scholz", November 17, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/germany-economy-scholz/germanys-november-coronavirus-aid-package-will-cost-14-bln-euros-scholz-idUSL8N2I32BN>

⁹⁸ Holger Hansen, "Germany to double net borrowing for 2021 to fight pandemic impact", *Reuters*, November 25, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-budget-debt-idUSKBN28709M>

⁹⁹ Federal Ministry of Finance, "A stimulus package for everyone in Germany", Issues, Federal Ministry of Finance, accessed March 7, 2021.

<https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Web/EN/Issues/Priority-Issues/stimulus-package-for-everyone/stimulus-package-for-everyone.html>

¹⁰⁰ Bekaj and Fernández Gibaja. *op. cit.* 21.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 21.

mail.¹⁰³ Bavaria automatically sent the ballots to all registered voters and, as a result, voter registration increased in comparison to past elections in Bavaria.¹⁰⁴ Such nonpartisan willingness to transition to postal-only voting and German experience with this electoral process emphasized the ability to maintain democratic rights even during a crisis, and how coronavirus was not used as a political tool. Because the process was seen to work, it could be replicated in other states and even in German national elections. Trust in mail-in voting in Germany contrasts with other federal systems' experience, such as in the United States, which saw large amounts of misinformation on mail-in voting circulated.¹⁰⁵

The year 2021 is significant for elections in Germany as six states have elections along with national parliamentary elections. As the pandemic has taken its toll for over a year with successive waves of infection, it is probably no surprise that the tone of campaigning about the pandemic has been more politicized. Angela Merkel is ending her tenure as Chancellor with a high approval rating as she has led the country through Covid-19 and through Brexit.¹⁰⁶ Her replacement remains a major political question, and the controversial vaccine distribution is sure to be a difficult election topic.¹⁰⁷

Impact of German geography, history, economic frameworks, and leadership

As part of central Europe, Germany's location coupled with its *de facto* leadership of the EU may have influenced rules surrounding border closures and intra-European travel. It is noteworthy that because of the Schengen agreement, Germany does not have any international land borders with other EU countries. Germany's economic and

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Davey Alba, "How Voting by Mail Tops Election Misinformation", Technology, *The New York Times*, September 30, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/technology/how-voting-by-mail-tops-election-misinformation.html>

¹⁰⁶ Christoph Hasselbach, "Germany 2021: Fighting COVID and replacing Angela Merkel", *Deutsche Welle*, January 1, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-2021-fighting-covid-and-replacing-angela-merkel/a-56086787>

¹⁰⁷ Geir Moulson, "Virus collides with politics as German election year starts", *AP News*, January 9, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/europe-angela-merkel-elections-coronavirus-pandemic-germany-b0462f0e74fe2eb579a42cf2377f018a>

political leadership throughout the years has deep impacts on its neighboring European Union partners as well as its own regional hegemony. Therefore, the government must contend with both internal and external politics frequently. Curiously, despite being a regional leader and taking many symbolic national actions, Germany did not declare a national state of emergency. The tragic history of the interwar Weimar Republic provides an explanation and Germany is more cautious about invoking emergency measures.¹⁰⁸ The Weimar Republic had made large use of emergency powers in its time, leaving for a poor precedent for invoking such powers again¹⁰⁹.

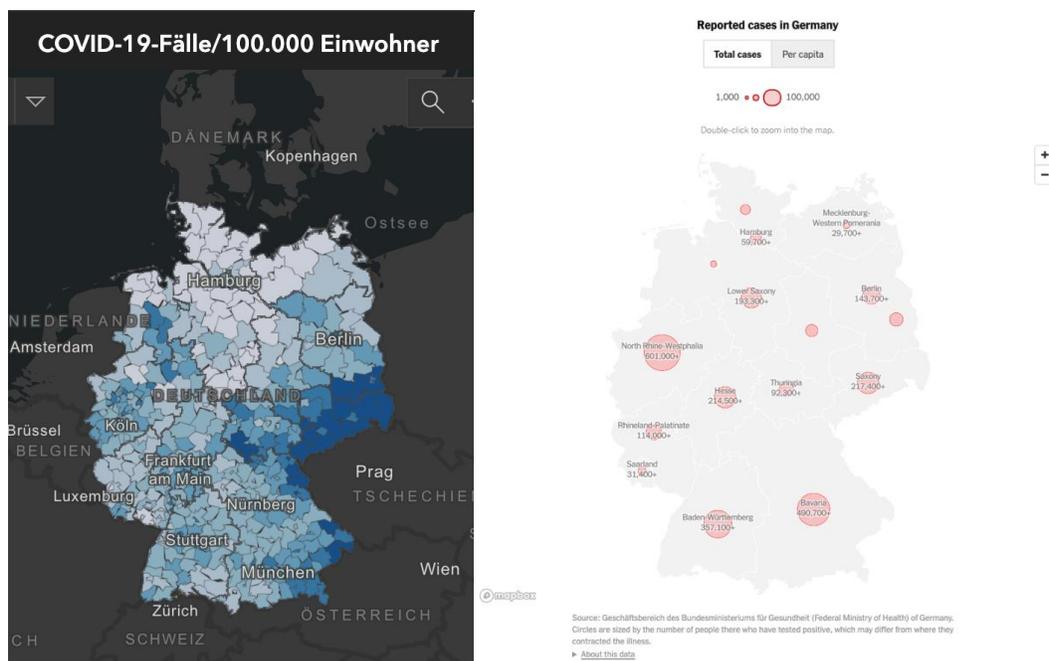


Figure 1: Comparing Covid-19 case distribution as per capita versus total case count. Left: Covid-19 cases per 100,000 people across Germany as of February 25, 2021.¹¹⁰ Right: Total reported Covid-19 cases as of March 28, 2021.¹¹¹

At first, a question arose regarding the relationship between population density and distribution of Covid-19 cases in the country. Figure 1 shows Covid-19 cases per 100,000

¹⁰⁸ Siewert, et al., *op. cit.* 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹¹⁰ Robert Koch Institute, "COVID-19-Fälle/100,000 Einwohner" [map]. 1"=300 km/200 mi. Robert Koch-Institut: COVID-19-Dashboard. Using: ArcGIS [GIS software]. Esri Germany. Accessed February 25, 2021. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/478220a4c454480e823b17327b2bf1d4/page/page_1/

¹¹¹ The New York Times, "Germany Coronavirus Map and Case Count", *op. cit.*

people as reported by RKI with higher frequency across the east German Länder, primarily in Saxony, than in those in the west. At the same time, the western part of the country has much higher rates of “total cases”, as for example in North Rhine-Westphalia.¹¹² The per capita rate demonstrates that, despite being a more rural area in the east, the virus still spread widely across the population.¹¹³ This leads to a socio-historical question, especially given the protests surrounding Covid-19 by far-right nationalists who come disproportionately from the east.

One reason may be that the population in east Germany is on average older than in the west.¹¹⁴ Younger people have been key contributors to the spread of Covid-19 in Germany.¹¹⁵ Western Germany has much more travel abroad with most of the main airports being in that part of the country.¹¹⁶ During the first winter of 2020, people were still traveling to Austria and Italy for ski trips.¹¹⁷ The wealth gaps between eastern and western Germany also contributed to vacation accessibility.¹¹⁸ In eastern Germany, positioning of states on the borders of Poland and the Czech Republic may have been another source of travel-influenced Covid-19 case influxes.¹¹⁹ Many people commute between these countries,¹²⁰ another example of how freedom of movement within the Schengen zone contributes to the difficulty of COVID-19 management. Was Covid-19 management in its earliest stages more successful in the former East Germany because of its communist history? Contrasts in this management presents a question on the intergenerational impact of democratic governance or lack thereof. Researchers have

¹¹² The New York Times, “Germany Coronavirus Map and Case Count”, The Coronavirus Outbreak, *The New York Times*, accessed March 2, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/europe/germany-coronavirus-cases.html#map>

¹¹³ Ruth Bender, “Covid-19 Sparks New East-West Divide in Germany – 30 Years After Reunification”, *Europe, The Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-sparks-new-east-west-divide-in-germany30-years-after-reunification-11601717400>

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Bender, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Sabine Kinkartz, “Germany's COVID hot spots: What drives the numbers?”, *Deutsche Welle*, December 15, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/far-right-coronavirus-covid/a-55942062>

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

noted differences that are still prevalent, such as people who live in the former East Germany being more “socially withdrawn” and “more inclined to accept government intervention in their lives.”¹²¹

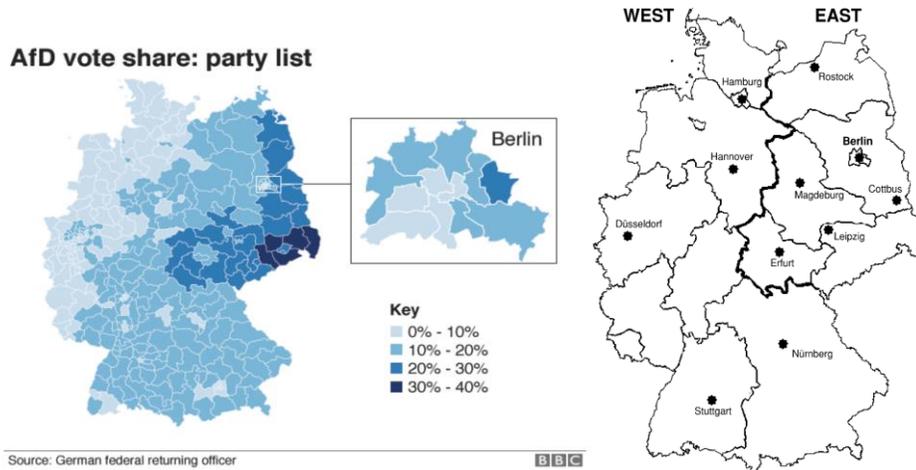


Figure 3: Distribution of AfD party votes (left¹²²) in comparison to the former East-West Germany border (right)¹²³

However, there are countervailing factors in the eastern part of the country. Support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is stronger in the former East Germany, as seen in the vote share below. The figures show a correlation between AfD support and coronavirus cases, particularly in Saxony. AfD leaders have been known to contribute to coronavirus conspiracy theories and some even call the government a “dictatorship” for mandating coronavirus restrictions.¹²⁴ Saxony has some of the fewest COVID regulations.¹²⁵ Another possible contributor to AfD support in east Germany may stem from the historically long road to economic recovery after German reunification¹²⁶ and

¹²¹ Bender, *op. cit.*

¹²² Jenny Hill, “German election: Why so many voters in the east chose AfD”, *BBC*, September 26, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41398628>;

¹²³ Claus-Christian Carbon & Leder, Helmut. (2005). The Wall inside the brain: Overestimation of distances crossing the former Iron Curtain. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*. 12. 746-50. 10.3758/BF03196767.

¹²⁴ BBC News, “Covid: Merkel warns of 'long, hard winter' as lockdowns return”, *BBC News*, October 29, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54728893>

¹²⁵ Siewert, et al., *op. cit.* 6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

that east Germany still lags in economic wealth.¹²⁷ However, as the country has been tested with this major crisis, support for AfD seems to be crumbling.¹²⁸ The party now has only an 8% approval rating, with issues growing within the party itself due to Covid-19.¹²⁹

The leadership of Chancellor Merkel supported a culture of science-based decision-making surrounding Covid-19 emergency management. Merkel remained honest about the challenges Covid-19 poses, but, as the German Marshall Fund notes, Merkel “repeatedly stressed that democratic principles guide her government’s coronavirus actions: transparency, expertise, communication, and the dignity of individual life.”¹³⁰ With a PhD in quantum chemistry, the leader’s scientific arguments leveraged the coronavirus restrictions and the need for mass testing and vaccinations schemes.¹³¹ Even as people protested lockdown measures as restrictions on freedom of movement, Merkel turned back to her youth living in non-democratic East Germany prior to reunification. She provided sympathy to Germans and emphasized the grave nature requiring these restrictions: she stated that “freedoms of movement and travel were hard-won rights [in East Germany]...In a democracy, [restrictions] should be enacted only temporarily – and never recklessly.”¹³² Utilizing history and a sense of democratic community, Merkel emphasized a political culture of trust in science-based government restrictions.

¹²⁷ Bender, *op. cit.*

¹²⁸ Costanze Stelzenmüller. “Germany’s far-right a major loser from COVID-19, so far”, Order From Chaos, The Brookings Institution, June 18, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/18/germanys-far-right-a-major-loser-from-covid-19-so-far/>

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Ian Beacock, Sudha David-Wilp; and Heidi Tworek, “COVID-19 Has Democratic Lessons to Teach. Has Angela Merkel Helped Germany to Learn Them?”, Policy Brief, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 2, 2020. <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/covid-19-has-democratic-lessons-teach-has-angela-merkel-helped-germany-learn-them>

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

Germany has had an increasingly robust health sector in recent years.¹³³ Many medical professionals could treat mild COVID-19 cases outside hospitals, leaving more room for the most critical cases in hospitals.¹³⁴ The healthcare system already had a large number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds available, and was able to quickly increase the 12,000-bed capacity to 40,000.¹³⁵ Germany also has multiple research centers and medical laboratories, ultimately supporting mass testing schemes¹³⁶ and vaccine development.¹³⁷ Economic systems display similarly sturdy and adaptable plans in the nation as the *Kurzarbeit* policy was used during the 2008 financial crisis.¹³⁸ This time, the decrease in unemployment set the stage for the *Kurzarbeit* to be expanded to other sectors impacted by Covid-19, such as the service industry.¹³⁹

Efficacy of Covid-19 management and human rights

The Lowy Institute conducts a study of coronavirus management with indicators such as: confirmed cases, confirmed deaths, confirmed cases per million people, confirmed deaths per million people, confirmed cases as a proportion of tests, [and] tests per thousand people.¹⁴⁰ Germany currently ranks 55 out of 98 countries in this indicator, with data used by the Lowy Institute up to January 2021.¹⁴¹ Germany's performance indicates that, despite some successes, there are many lessons still to be learned by the government, health officials, and citizens alike.

One of the major general criticisms of Germany's coronavirus response is the weak human-rights based approach to coronavirus mitigation and planning. A critical question

¹³³ Jens Spahn, "How Germany contained the coronavirus", Agenda, World Economic Forum, May 23, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/how-germany-contained-the-coronavirus/>

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ David Gelles, "The Husband-and-Wife Team Behind the Leading Vaccine to Solve Covid-19", *The New York Times*, November 10, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/business/biontech-covid-vaccine.html>

¹³⁸ Sullivan, *op.cit.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ The Lowy Institute, "Covid Performance Index: Deconstructing Pandemic Responses", The Lowy Institute, accessed March 8, 2021. <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/covid-performance/>

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

most democracies must address is how digital technology is managed as an enabler or deterrent of rights. Coronavirus brought this to the forefront as access to education and communication became digitized to a high level.

The rights of children and access to education is a fundamental aspect of intergenerational democratic resiliency. Incorporating civic education, access to information, and freedoms of speech and expression are critical ways to involve youth in democratic systems. As schools closed and moved to remote learning around the world, a derivative challenge surrounding public health management came with aspects of child development and adequate access to information. Germany was criticized for the inequity of children's access to education during Covid-19. Human Rights Watch (HRW) submitted an inquiry to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding Germany covering Covid-19 management.¹⁴² HRW reported many children having limited internet access, whether it be Wi-Fi, a computer, or both.¹⁴³ The lack of internet access particularly impacted refugee and migrant children, who additionally face language barriers, and children with disabilities.¹⁴⁴

Germany's response also brought human rights to the forefront of political discussions surrounding Covid-19 messaging and access to COVID-related information. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) notes that the homeless population in Germany have compromised rights.¹⁴⁵ Lockdown restrictions, curfews, and access to healthcare services are some of the aspects of Covid-19 regulations that could impact the human rights of homeless people, especially in the justice system

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch, "Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Review of Germany: 88th pre-session", Statement, Human Rights Watch, November 25, 2020.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/25/submission-committee-rights-childs-review-germany>

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Hugh Williamson, "How Can Germans 'Stay at Home' If They Are Homeless?", Dispatches, Human Rights Watch, March 26, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/26/how-can-germans-stay-home-if-they-are-homeless#>

as people could receive tickets or be arrested in some countries for violating Covid-19 mandates despite not being able to find shelter.¹⁴⁶

The rights of migrants and asylum seekers during Covid-19 also fell under political scrutiny. As mentioned, the rights of migrant children within the school system were harmed. Furthermore, despite refugees having high risks of poor health conditions and undiagnosed illnesses, most were not considered “high risk” of contracting Covid-19 since most refugees in Germany are under the age of 60.¹⁴⁷ Access to information mostly occurs through word of mouth in refugee communities, leading to misinformation and even panic.¹⁴⁸ A municipal government did not report to the people that a refugee reception center was put under lockdown because of a positive Covid-19 patient.¹⁴⁹ Rather, there were rumors of mass deportation leading to attempts to flee due to panic.¹⁵⁰ While some civil society groups have worked on translating coronavirus information into target languages, different levels of government have faltered in their responsibility to provide information, and hygienic supplies, to marginalized groups.¹⁵¹

On the other hand, exemplary government responses empowering refugees could have been replicated in other parts of Germany. Saxony decreased administrative barriers for qualified migrant healthcare workers.¹⁵² This allowed for greater sensitivity in the medical profession towards marginalized groups and can provide work authorization support. Lessons can be learned from this critique of human rights and children’s rights. Could the federal system in Germany have better navigated this at the national level, especially as state and local governments were focused on mass testing and healthcare infrastructure? It suggests that the federal system might need tweaking. For example,

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ David Kamiab Hesari, Marrium Habib, Muhammad Zaman, and Clarissa Prazeres Da Costa, “Germany and COVID-19: What About the Refugees?”, *Global Health Now*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, June 2, 2020. <https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2020-06/germany-and-covid-19-what-about-refugees>

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

there should be clear and standardized operating procedures for communicating lockdowns in sensitive areas such as refugee reception centers. Moreover, the federal government could have provided more development funding for internet infrastructure provisions along with Covid-19 research and development, or applied for EU funding, to help more children access education.

The government's original discourse surrounding PPE also generated significant controversy that hampers democratic trust. As in other countries, the German government initially disseminated information stating that mask-wearing did not reduce the risk of contracting Covid-19.¹⁵³ But this was "an effort to keep public demand low until there were enough masks for the country's healthcare workers".¹⁵⁴ Such misinformation for tactical reasons has significant impacts on coronavirus transmission, compliance with mask mandates, and general trust in public health institutions. The healthcare workers who protested PPE shortages also sharply criticized the government's handling of PPE distribution. As a response to that protest in April 2020, Germany announced a centralization of PPE procurement.¹⁵⁵ This provides a lesson on when it might be appropriate for the federal government to have certain emergency and market responsibilities as opposed to more devolved systems.

Political contentions surrounding emergency management at the state and national level bring forth the broader question of the evolution of German democracy. While not necessarily in decline, the democratic powers of different governance levels during emergencies may be re-evaluated based on the experiences managing Covid-19.¹⁵⁶ This unprecedented era can lead to lessons about regulation, engagement with civil society, differentiating between types of emergencies, and how to protect democratic rights in the digital age during normal times.

¹⁵³ Meyer-Resende, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Connolly, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ Siewert, et al., *op. cit.* 8.

Preserving democracy and learning about structural vulnerabilities during crisis

Germany provides an example of how a government system, democracy or not, can both struggle and succeed in a crisis. The federal democratic system emphasizes how multi-level crisis management allocations between federal, state, and municipal governments can be extremely effective in decreasing coronavirus rates and building strong healthcare infrastructures. Just as China, with an authoritarian government, was able to build a hospital in Wuhan, in a few days with 1,000 beds,¹⁵⁷ Berlin too managed to construct a hospital with 500 beds in a few weeks.¹⁵⁸ Despite bureaucracy sometimes stalling projects in democratic governments compared to top-down authoritarian systems, local initiatives such as the one in Berlin demonstrates that democracy can also generate speedy responses. Importantly, the checks and balances system within Germany acted effectively. The judicial system heard cases on the constitutionality of some regulations thus providing a legal avenue for critiquing the government's response to ensure that it did not have a nefarious agenda. The work of civil society organizations, such as those who translated resources for refugee communities, demonstrates that partnerships in a democratic society can fill gaps where governments are not meeting needs, unlike in authoritarian regimes that attack civil society.

Throughout the pandemic, Germany continued to support the EU and resisted temptations to make it a scapegoat for its own failures. The EU management of vaccination procurement may yet prove to be a credit to the Union by avoiding wealth hierarchies. The EU Temporary Framework provided a coordinating basis for other countries in their stimulus aid while maintaining a commitment to EU principles and goals.¹⁵⁹ Germany supported the EU in these areas demonstrating effective leadership and bolstering the EU in a time of uncertainty.

¹⁵⁷ Sophie Williams, "Coronavirus: How can China build a hospital so quickly?", *BBC*, January 31, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51245156>

¹⁵⁸ Meyer-Resende, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ European Commission, Rep. *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Temporary Framework for State Aid Measures to Support the Economy in the Current COVID-19 Outbreak*. European Commission,

This case study identifies how partisan politics can damage public health management and public safety even in a democracy. Human rights violations occurred against marginalized groups, far-right groups perpetuated misinformation and hate speech in Covid-related protests, and election prospects caused politicians to be more wary of taking decisive action. The race for politicians to gain or keep power had an impact on coronavirus regulations. Such politics perpetuated an “in group” and “out group” dynamic, between Germany and other countries, between racial and ethnic groups, and between German political parties. Far-right rhetoric in Germany in relation to Covid-19¹⁶⁰ has led to an increase in hate crime, such as against Asian¹⁶¹ and Jewish populations.¹⁶² Politicians and scientists supporting Covid-19 regulations have been threatened too.¹⁶³ Even in a democratic society, governments and civil society must put partisan politics aside in situations of emergency to emphasize human rights protections.

Any government can make mistakes in managing a pandemic, as little was initially known about the virus and globalization caused it to spread quickly and broadly. Germany was tested to see if it would succumb to it, as well as to a virus of democratic decline and authoritarianism. Through negotiation and careful language that did not include terminology such as “war” or “enemy” but rather one of community problem-solving, Germany was generally able to manage the pandemic effectively.¹⁶⁴ The hyper-

March 19, 2020. 3. https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/sa_covid19_temporary-framework.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Sabine Siebold, “Citing far-right sway, Germany tracks COVID protesters”, *Reuters*, December 9, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/germany-security-coronavirus-idUSKBN28J108>

¹⁶¹ Lucas G. Drouhot, Sören Petermann, Karen Schönwälder, and Steven Vertovec. 2021. “Has the Covid-19 Pandemic Undermined Public Support for a Diverse Society? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Germany.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44 (5): 877-92. 877-878.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1832698>.

¹⁶² Deutsche Welle, “Germany sees spike in anti-Semitic crimes – reports”, *Deutsche Welle*, February 11, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-sees-spike-in-anti-semitic-crimes-reports/a-56537178>

¹⁶³ Elliot Douglas, “COVID: German politicians, scientists face threats online”, *Deutsche Welle*, February 16, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-german-politicians-scientists-face-threats-online/a-56589911>

¹⁶⁴ Dagmar Paulus, “German politicians don't talk about the virus like other nations. Here's what it means”, *Agenda*, World Economic Forum, June 2, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/coronavirus-pandemic-covid19-germany-politicians-language/>

individualism present in other democratic systems¹⁶⁵ contributes to coronavirus mismanagement, human rights violations of minorities, and democratic decline, while authoritarian regimes hinder individual rights such as free speech and the rights of marginalized groups that can also lead to mismanagement. The key themes to draw from Germany's experience include communication and framing successes, information openness, learning from history, auditing governmental responses, and strategic coordination across several national and continental governance levels. Germany needs to continue to take a human-rights based approach to consolidate German and EU democracy in the vaccination and recovery phase.

¹⁶⁵ Scottie Andrew, "America's response to the coronavirus is the most American thing ever", *CNN*, updated May 19, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/19/us/american-individualism-coronavirus-trnd/index.html>

Chapter 6

RUSSIA: A CONTEST BETWEEN SCIENCE AND DENIAL

Amar Wason

From the onset of the global pandemic, Russia sought to thrust itself into a leading international role. Tracking the crisis through a Russian lens, while not quite Dostoyevsky's somber description of the *Russian Soul*, reactions were in keeping with the nation's identity, historical memory, and the ambitions of its autocratic head of state. Alternatively, tracking the Kremlin's behavior through the lens of the crisis provides an opportunity to understand some of its long-established goals both domestically and abroad. The following chapter attempts to bring a sense of context to each while following the spread of the virus throughout Russia.

The Virus Lands

Given its uniquely autocratic structure of government, an analysis of Russia's encounter with Covid-19 centers on an analysis of one man, his decisions, and his goals: Vladimir Putin. The novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) landed within Russian borders on January 31, 2020, with the first two confirmed cases within the Federation coming one day after the W.H.O.'s declaration of a "public health emergency of international concern" stemming from the outbreak in Wuhan, China.¹ Each of these initial two cases

¹ WHO, "Timeline-Covid-19", June 29 2020. <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>

involved Chinese nationals; one in the Tyumen region of Russia and the other in the Zabaikalsky region.²

In comparison to its neighbors in Europe, the spread of Covid-19 in Russia was relatively delayed. There was certainly sufficient time following China's initial outbreak in January, in which Beijing implemented a "forcible lockdown of 150 million people over a 70-day period" for Putin to take decisive action.³ He instead decided to take partial measures in restricting certain travel. The first of these restrictions was put in place on January 24, 2020, when Russia implemented a travel ban from Wuhan, which eventually led to a ban of all tourist groups originating in China.⁴

The first instance of a Russian citizen contracting the virus involved a woman on a cruise liner off the coast of Japan on February 17, 2020.⁵ Within a month's time, the virus penetrated the metropolitan areas of the country. The first confirmed case in Moscow was verified on March 2, followed three days later by the first confirmed case in St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, by the end of March 2020, there were under 500 reported cases of Covid-19 in this expansive nation of 145 million people.⁶ These numbers reflected a situation in which President Vladimir Putin deemed the virus "under control" within Russia's borders.⁷ One month later, and 3 months after the arrival of Covid-19 in Russia, the U.S, U.K., France, and Germany were already dealing with the virus in the range of between

² Sam Merideth; Weizhen Tan; Evelyn Cheng, "China says coronavirus death toll hits 213", *CNBC*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-latest-updates-china-says-death-toll-rises.html>

³ Judith Twig, "Trump and Putin's Pandemic Duet", *CSIS*, 21 August 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/trump-and-putins-pandemic-duet-trumps-america-far-more-out-tune>

⁴ Leyla Latypova, "Russia's Response to the Coronavirus: The 2020 Timeline", *Moscow Times*, 21 December 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/21/russias-response-to-the-coronavirus-the-2020-timeline-a72420>

⁵ Radio Free Europe, "Woman On Cruise Ship Becomes First Russian Infected With Coronavirus", *RFE*, 17 February 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-first-russian-woman-infected-cruise-ship/30438575.html>

⁶ Statista Research Department, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Russia - statistics & facts", *Statista*, 6 April 2021. <https://www.statista.com/topics/6205/coronavirus-Covid-19-in-russia/>

⁷ AFP, "Virus Situation in Russia 'Under Control,' Putin Says", *Moscow Times*, 17 March 2020, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/03/17/virus-situation-in-russia-under-control-putin-says-a69659>

two to three thousand confirmed cases per one million people.⁸ Russia, meanwhile, reported numbers which round out at about just 730 cases per one million people.⁹

At this juncture, Putin's words seemed to be carrying some weight. The low numbers were, quite frankly, impressive by any account considering the surge taking place in Europe to its immediate west and the virus' origins in Asia to its immediate east. Rather than explanations based on political leadership or a particular communal reaction, one possible explanation for the unique trajectory of the virus' initial spread in Russia might be found in the nation's equally unique geodemographic conditions.

The Ural Mountains in western Russia serve to roughly separate Europe and Asia, with the Tyumen Oblast and Zabaykalsky Krai geographically located on opposite ends of the Asian side of Russia, a distance of approximately 4,550 km. Across this vast land mass of Russia, with just under 9 persons per square-kilometer, gives the country a global ranking of 181st in population density.¹⁰ More specifically, the two initially affected regions of Tyumen and Zabaikalsky rank 30th (9.6/sq.km) and 49th (2.4/sq.km) in population density within the 85 federal units that comprise the Russian Federation.¹¹ Given the low population density of not just the nation itself, but the federal units initially involved too, it is understandable that community transmission was restricted in Russia over the course of the following months.

Political Considerations

To assess Russia's response to the pandemic, it is important to examine the political context and the significance of 2020 during which Putin was planning major

⁸ Hannah Ritchie; Esteban Ortiz-Ospina; Diana Beltekian; Edouard Mathieu; Joe Hasell; Bobbie Macdonald; Charlie Giattino; Cameron Appel; Lucas Rodés-Guirao; and Max Roser, "Russia: Coronavirus Pandemic Country Profile", *Our World in Data*, 16 May 2021.

<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/russia>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ United Nations - World Population Prospects, "Russia Population Density 1950-2021", *Macrotrends*, 2021, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/RUS/russia/population-density>

¹¹ Statista Research Department, "Demographics of Russia", *Statista*, 17 February 2021.

<https://www.statista.com/topics/5937/demographics-of-russia/>

initiatives. On January 15, he announced proposals for sweeping political “reforms” aimed at consolidating his power, resulting in the resignation of the Russian government to “make way for major new constitutional changes”.¹² These actions sought to reconcile Putin’s desire to stay in power with the constitutional term limits preventing him from seeking yet another term as President at the expiration of his current term in 2024. Under the new legislation, his reign could be extended to 2036, by which time the Russian strongman will turn 83. In addition, the new legislation had several other beneficial aspects of the incumbent: it expanded immunity for former presidents, transforming them into senators for life; it enacted tougher internet restrictions; and it extended the law requiring individuals and groups conducting political activity and receiving funds from abroad to register as ‘foreign agents’, thus subjecting them to greater restrictions.¹³ The ratification of these amendments, and therefore the issue of Putin’s eligibility to remain in office, would be decided by a vote by the Russian people in an August 2020 referendum. Putin would not wish the virus to get in the way of his political plans.

Unsurprisingly, domestic policy and foreign relations coordinated from the Kremlin and were pressed into service in furtherance of a common objective which has been constant since Putin first occupied the Presidency in 1999: to keep Putin at the head of an increasingly autocratic regime that wields an iron grip over political power domestically, while returning Russia to a position of increased influence internationally. For a man whose lengthy stay in power has been bolstered by a carefully curated public persona, one built upon images of Putin at times fishing, hunting, and playing hockey,¹⁴ while at other times playing piano, or singing for celebrities, the need to maintain it has become paramount for his efforts to retain power. The arrival of a global pandemic did

¹² Matt Clinch and Holly Ellyatt, “Putin consolidates power as Russian government resigns”, *CNBC*, 15 January 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/15/russian-government-has-resigned-report-says-citing-pm.html>

¹³ Brian Taylor, “Putin’s Rules of the Game”, *Foreign Affairs*, 12 April 2021.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-04-12/putins-rules-game>

¹⁴ Alec Luhn, “Vladimir Putin celebrates birthday on ice in celebrity hockey match”, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/07/vladimir-putin-birthday-ice-hockey-match>

not fit in with this image. The disconnect may be helpful in deciphering the veracity of pandemic-related data provided by the Russian state while analyzing the highs and lows it encountered during the following year.

International Relations Implications

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, trust between the West and Russia has waned, affecting both its international role and its behavior regarding the global pandemic. Russian public diplomacy portrays itself as an attractive alternative to Western-dominated political discourses by presenting itself as a defender of so-called “sovereign democracy” and a conservator of traditional culture in the face of Western-led globalization and the societal changes it brings.¹⁵ Putin’s overarching personal goal is simply to remain in power, and the foreign policy he directs serves this purpose by emphasizing its military power to gain acceptance and legitimacy in Russian eyes. One tactic in this regard is to capitalize on missteps by Western democracies. The arrival of the pandemic would also be made to serve this purpose.

For Putin, the pandemic presented an opportunity to create an impression of the effectiveness of Russia’s governance in comparison to its Western counterparts. In early April 2020, while Russia had not yet experienced the brunt of the initial surge in cases and the U.S was reeling from sky-rocketing infection rates, the Kremlin sent a military aircraft to JFK Airport in NYC packed with humanitarian aid in the form of masks and ventilators. The following day, *The New York Times* described the event as Russia “turning the tables” by reversing the humiliation of receiving aid in the form of cheap chicken thighs (or “Bush thighs” as the Russians disdainfully referred to them) during the poverty-stricken years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Putin must have been more than satisfied with the headlines, which ran coupled with images of the Russian An-124 military transport touching down on the runway in New York City, thus

¹⁵ Dima Kortuko, “‘Sovereign Democracy’ and the Politics of Ideology in Putin’s Russia”, *Brill*, 2 April 2020. https://brill.com/view/journals/rupo/5/1/article-p81_4.xml?language=en

¹⁶ Anton Troianovsky, “Turning the Tables, Russia Sends Virus Aid to U.S.”, *New York Times*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/coronavirus-us-russia-aid.html>

bolstering his claim that the collapse of the USSR was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century.¹⁷

The move also brought to light different perceptions between the Kremlin and the people. Putin was careful to make sure that the stunt was not overly publicized in Moscow, as concerns existed in the Kremlin about whether the Russian public would take as much pleasure in embarrassing the U.S. as Putin’s regime did.¹⁸ The timing was particularly sensitive due to the upcoming referendum regarding Putin’s term limits. While the Kremlin may have been eager to score a public relations victory on the international stage and quell its post-Soviet thirst for revenge, the Russian citizenry may understandably have taken issue with the premise of Russia giving aid to any country as wealthy as the U.S., let alone an adversary. This was especially true considering Putin’s domestic response over the two weeks prior, during which he had issued a non-working order across Russia, shut its borders, grounded international flights, and postponed the all-important 2020 Russian constitutional referendum.¹⁹

A Lockdown?

The terminology of Putin’s countrywide non-working order provides an example of what would become a common theme in his political strategy for managing of Covid-19 politics. While his non-working order stopped well short of a lockdown, only strongly suggesting that Russians stay at home, a number of regional politicians including Moscow’s Mayor Sergey Sobyenin enforced much stricter stay-at-home orders. It served as the autocratic version of U.S. President Donald Trump’s ploy to deal with the virus by handing off a lion’s share of responsibility to state governors to stay close enough to take credit and far enough away to deflect blame. Public bans on campaigning, which frustrated voters in the U.S. presidential election, would be managed and enforced in

¹⁷ Andrew Osborn, “Putin: Collapse of the Soviet Union was ‘catastrophe of the century’”, *The Independent*, 6 October 2011. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-collapse-soviet-union-was-catastrophe-century-521064.html>

¹⁸ Troianovski, “Turning the Tables,” *op cit*.

¹⁹ Latypova, *op cit*.

Russia by local governments. On March 25, Putin addressed the nation urging calm and announcing a 9-day paid holiday in addition to delaying the upcoming referendum.²⁰ Four days later, Mayor Sobyenin enforced lockdown orders in Moscow that were stricter than most European cities.²¹ It is uncomfortable to note the similar strategies employed in dealing with the global pandemic by a democratic leader seeking reelection and an autocrat seeking to prolong his stay in power. Despite dominance over Russian politics over the past two decades, Putin remains sensitive to domestic public opinion; meanwhile, Trump tried to win favor with a segment of the electorate by mimicking autocratic behavior within a functioning democracy. In the months to come, however, Putin would receive a harsh reminder about the realities of Russia's position both at home and within the global order.

Despite the late arrival of the surge in confirmed Covid-19 cases in Russia, Putin's declaration that the pandemic was "under control" ended up being severely premature, aging about as well as George W. Bush's infamous "mission accomplished" statement aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln.²² Fast forward one month from Putin's stunt of a military plane packed with masks and ventilators to embarrass the U.S., the spread of the virus in Russia (by now 2781 per one million people) was not only outpacing its impact in the European Union (2608 per one million people) but also much of the world, giving it the undesirable title of having the second highest number of confirmed cases globally (405,843 people).²³

²⁰ Alexander Marrow, "Putin offers week-long holiday for Russians in social package to combat coronavirus", *Reuters*, 25 March 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-putin-holidays/putin-offers-week-long-holiday-for-russians-in-social-package-to-combat-coronavirus-idUSKBN21C2SH>

²¹ Evgenia Pismennaya and Henry Meyer, "Moscow Mayor's Tough Virus Stance May Hasten Russia Lockdown", *Bloomberg*, 21 March 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-27/moscow-mayor-s-tough-virus-stance-may-hasten-russia-lockdown>

²² Seth Cline, "The Other Symbol of George W. Bush's Legacy", *US News*, 1 May 2013. <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/press-past/2013/05/01/the-other-symbol-of-george-w-bushs-legacy>

²³ Statista Research Department, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Russia," *op cit*.

Russia suddenly found itself in the midst of a full-blown crisis, and Putin's personal ambitions became even more of a hindrance in its response to the pandemic. With Putin relatively silent following his ineffective call for calm, politicians and political observers nationwide heaped praise upon Mayor Sobyenin for his tough lockdown. Muscovites, however, were left largely confused by the sudden change in demeanor from their leadership. With no state of emergency declared, it was unclear whether the mayor actually had the legal authority to implement the lockdown in the manner in which he did. In addition to shutting down schools, businesses, and transit like most countries throughout Europe, Sobyenin's ban included no exemption for any outdoor exercise. As noted by human rights lawyer Pavel Chikov, "Businesses don't understand how to make up for losses. Citizens don't know whether they'll be punished for walking their dogs or taking out the trash."²⁴ Considering that this ban was widely celebrated in political circles in Moscow, which encouraged that it be embraced by all of Russia, it should not be surprising that confusion spread through other regions as quickly as the virus itself. A failure on the part of those issuing lockdown orders "to cite relevant laws or quote doctors with expertise in infectious diseases"²⁵ left much of the population facing the capricious decisions of local authorities, many of whom were in just as much confusion as the citizenry.

In Chechnya, a region ruled by a Kremlin-backed strongman, there were "reports of men armed with batons and pipes patrolling the streets and disciplining anyone who leaves home without a mask"; fines up to 300,000 rubles (approximately US\$3,800) were doled out in St. Petersburg for those disobeying unclear mandates; and banks that Putin had promised would support businesses required to pay their staff during the "non-working" week had yet to make good on that promise.²⁶ The public, unsurprisingly, became less than enthused with the lockdown measures, and it became clear to Putin that

²⁴ Matthew Luxmoore, "Forced Into Lockdown, Muscovites Question The State's Shifting Coronavirus Response", *Radio Free Europe*, 30 March 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-coronavirus-moscow-lockdown-sobyenin-putin-forced-quarantine/30518410.html>

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*.

before long, the blame would inevitably land at his own feet. Nevertheless, for the time being, he instructed his regional deputies to take all necessary measures, and of course inform the public of them without his help, “even if they seem excessive to some”.²⁷

Autocratic Enforcement

The autocratic nature of the Russian government was on display not only through the issuing of mandates lacking scientific backing and with a doubtful basis under Russian law, while at the same time shielding Putin from scrutiny, but also through the means of monitoring and enforcing the lockdown restrictions. Putin has always been bullish about the potential of artificial intelligence, going as far as to state in 2017 that “whoever gains a monopoly in AI will rule the world.” Russian state authorities have used the pandemic as an opportunity to increase reliance on AI systems to track and monitor its citizens.²⁸ In 2019, even before the pandemic had swept the city, Moscow had brokered a deal with state-owned financial services company Sberbank to implement an “experimental legal regime” with the purpose of “developing AI focusing on facial recognition, transport, and medicine using the more than 160,000 cameras that already watch the city’s 12 million inhabitants.”²⁹ In January 2020, the facial recognition capabilities created by Ntechlabs, a software company financed by the country’s sovereign wealth fund (the Russian Direct Investment Fund), was responsible for identifying over 200 Muscovites guilty of infringing self-isolation orders following travel abroad.³⁰ By mid-March, 200 more citizens were caught breaking Covid restrictions by

²⁷ Isabelle Khurshudyan, “As Russian coronavirus cases rise, Putin delegates tough action to Moscow mayor”, *Washington Post*, 30 March 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/as-moscow-enters-strict-quarantine-putin-has-been-notably-silent/2020/03/30/e32f2444-7258-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc_story.html

²⁸ David Meyer, “Vladimir Putin Says Whoever Leads in Artificial Intelligence Will Rule the World”, *Fortune*, 4 September 2017. <https://fortune.com/2017/09/04/ai-artificial-intelligence-putin-rule->

²⁹ Paul Goodie, “Russia and Digital Surveillance in the Wake of COVID-19”, *Washington Post*, 4 May 2020. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/russia-and-digital-surveillance-in-the-wake-of-Covid-19/>

³⁰ Robyn Dixon, “In Russia, facial surveillance and threat of prison being used to make coronavirus quarantines stick”, *Washington Post*, 25 March 2020. [/www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-russia-facial-surveillance-and-risk-of-jail-see-to-make-coronavirus-quarantines-stick/2020/03/24/a590c7e8-6dbf-11ea-a156-0048b62cdb51_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-russia-facial-surveillance-and-risk-of-jail-see-to-make-coronavirus-quarantines-stick/2020/03/24/a590c7e8-6dbf-11ea-a156-0048b62cdb51_story.html)

cameras that were now capable of detecting the distance between individuals, and thus whether they are standing too close together.³¹

The creation of a “coronavirus information center,” which pulls together surveillance cameras and artificial intelligence to properly enforce stay at home mandates, has provided the Kremlin with a chance to test the limits of their new technological capabilities during the pandemic. A successful test will provide the Kremlin with the long-term ability to gather data from its population and advance the machine learning capabilities of instruments enhancing Putin’s grip on power. In this regard, the pandemic has allowed the Russian state to invest heavily in the domestic AI industry that otherwise lagged significantly behind China and the U.S., demonstrating a path forward for a Russia “lacking the vast troves of user data possessed by China and the market conditions found in the West”³²

In the market conditions that *do* apply in Russia, signals such as these from an authoritarian strongman under pressure have led Russian tech companies to the conclusion that it is the right time to seek investment from the state. Nevertheless, despite the relative success AI has experienced during the Covid-19 period, its overall limitations have been exposed. At its core, the strength of the Russian AI industry, on an international scale, is grounded in its ability to filter internet traffic and control various political narratives through social media. At a time when people around the world find themselves locked inside their homes looking for answers on the internet, this can be a critically useful tool. Although Russia has been successful in causing chaos and upheaval in other countries, the state AI machine has been of little use domestically. Disinformation campaigns might be able to create crises, but they can do little to bring an end to them. But Putin continues to make clear, as have his acolytes at the regional level, that AI stands

³¹ Mary Ilyushina, “How Russia is using authoritarian tech to curb coronavirus”, *CNN*, 29 March 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/29/europe/russia-coronavirus-authoritarian-tech-intl/index.html>

³² Goodie, *op cit*.

to be a key feature in the Russian government's relationship with its citizenry for the foreseeable future.³³

The Primacy of the Referendum

With the arrival of summer and Russia reeling from soaring viral infection rates, the option of boasting about how there was “de facto no virus” in the country, as Kremlin spokesman Dmitri S. Peskov proclaimed in late March, was no longer available in the state's playbook.³⁴ Such folly could no longer be peddled to anyone either domestically or internationally. So instead, Putin looked towards his short-term goal of maintaining power indefinitely. Victory Day, which marks the Russian triumph over Nazi Germany in World War II and serves as an annual source of national pride in Russia, is generally held on May 9. Covid-19 had initially prompted a delay of the celebratory military parade in the Red Square, but despite Russia just starting to outpace the EU in viral infection rates at the start of June, Putin, ever the political opportunist, decided that a loosening of lockdown restrictions would curry public opinion in his favor ahead of the constitutional referendum regarding term limits.³⁵ The 75th anniversary of this major holiday in Russia was ostensibly conducted with the aim of strengthening the sense of national pride and togetherness, but its timing, before the referendum now rescheduled to take place at the end of the month, suggested that it had a campaign motive as well.

The desire of Putin to stoke this sense of national pride and unity as a political tool was unmistakable. On June 8, two weeks prior to the Victory Day parade, Moscow Mayor Sobyenin announced the end of lockdown in the capital city by writing to his constituents, “I would like to congratulate you on our latest joint victory”.³⁶ The concept

³³ Nikolai Markotkin and Elena Chernenko, “Developing Artificial Intelligence in Russia: Objectives and Reality”, Carnegie Moscow Center, 8 May 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/82422>

³⁴ Steve Rosenberg, “Coronavirus: Russians confused and wary of strict coronavirus lockdown”, *BBC*, 31 March 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-52095550>

³⁵ Sarah Rainsford, “Coronavirus: No Russia lockdown as Putin puts on show of calm”, *BBC*, 22 March 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51972974>

³⁶ Anton Troianovski, “Russians were urged to return to normal life. Except for Putin”, *Baltimore Sun*, 2 October 2020. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/sns-nyt-putin-protects-himself-more-than-his-people-20201002-wnyhp6aadze2np5opntn3ydc-story.html>

of *we* being touted by Mayor Sobyenin is formulated to emphasize Vladimir Putin's unassailable position as head of state. Despite a surging pandemic, bars and restaurants were reopened to the public two days before Victory Day celebrations, with the highly consequential Russian constitutional referendum scheduled to commence the day after the parade on June 25, 2020.

The domestic gameplan to put Putin's personal political ambitions above the health of the Russian population bore fruit. From the day the Russian state authorities began loosening lockdown restrictions on June 8 until the release of the referendum results on July 1, 2020, there was a 37% increase in confirmed cases throughout the country.³⁷ Despite the reality of a pandemic spiraling out of control, Putin got the result he desired from the constitutional referendum. All but one of Russia's 85 federal units voted in favor of the required changes to the constitution.³⁸ In sum, an astounding 78.6% of Russians were reported as voting "yes" to Putin's proposals.³⁹

In an autocratic society as is the case with Russia, a referendum can only mean so much. Issues of government interference, a lack of democratic controls, and compromised election integrity naturally bring the legitimacy of such referendums into question. Indeed, three days following the release of the referendum results, the EU responded to reports of irregularities surrounding the process by calling for an investigation into allegations of "voter coercion, multiple voting, violation of secrecy of the vote, and allegations of police violence against a journalist who was present to observe".⁴⁰ As will be discussed below, referendum results are not the only numbers an autocratic government is prone to manipulate. Nevertheless, while genuine questions may be asked of the validity of poll numbers and the actual extent of Putin's favorability, there can be

³⁷ Statista Research Department, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Russia," *op cit*.

³⁸ Andrew Higgins, "The Theatrical Method in Putin's Vote Madness", *New York Times*, 1 July, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/world/europe/putin-referendum-vote-russia.html>

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ Zoe Didili, "EU calls for investigation into allegations of irregularities in Russian referendum vote", *New Europe*, 4 July 2020. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/eu-calls-for-investigation-into-allegations-of-irregularities-in-russian-referendum-vote/>

no doubting the general sense of his popularity at home nor that a clear majority voted in favor of the referendum.⁴¹

The New Sputnik

With his primary domestic goal of “legitimizing” his extended grip on power using a questionable referendum now complete, Putin was able to direct his focus primarily towards his broad, long-term, international goal of positioning Russia as a major power that demands respect. With the global pandemic as a backdrop, and more specifically, the global race to produce a vaccine in full gear, Putin sensed an opportunity to meet multiple ends. By analyzing the journey of Russia’s sprint towards a vaccine through the lens of Putin’s ambitions, the extent to which it was shaped by that ambition becomes increasingly evident. On August 11, 2020 Putin announced that Russia had won the global, Covid-era “space race” and approved the world’s first coronavirus vaccine.⁴² Its name, Sputnik V, is an ode to the 1957 launch of the Sputnik, which became the first artificial satellite to orbit in space.⁴³ A desire to relive the same victorious underdog role played by the Soviet Union during humanity’s quest to leave the bounds of earth’s atmosphere no doubt fueled Russia’s vaccine development and distribution strategy. The vaccine met numerous goals for the Russian state and for Vladimir Putin. Apart from the obvious benefits of being the first to produce a reliable Covid-19 vaccine for not only the Russian people but for all of humanity, there are numerous Kremlin foreign policy advantages.

The Soviet Union held a proud history of global leadership within the realm of vaccine innovation. During the 1950s the Soviets played a key role in the production of

⁴¹ Statista Research Department, “Vladimir Putin's approval rating in Russia monthly 1999-2021”, *Statista*, April 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/896181/putin-approval-rating-russia/>

⁴² Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber and Vladimir Soldatkin, “Putin hails new Sputnik moment as Russia is first to approve a COVID-19 vaccine”, *Reuters*, 11 August 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-russia-vaccine-put/putin-hails-new-sputnik-moment-as-russia-is-first-to-approve-a-Covid-19-vaccine-idUSKCN25712U>

⁴³ Joshua Yaffa, “The Sputnik V Vaccine and Russia’s Race to Immunity”, *The New Yorker*, 1 February 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/08/the-sputnik-v-vaccine-and-russias-race-to-immunity>

oral polio vaccinations and continued in this leading role by donating “more smallpox vaccine to the World Health Organization than all other countries combined during the eradication campaign in the 1960s and 1970s”. At the time, it found a similar use as a diplomatic weapon, with the vast number of exports highlighting the way in which the Soviets were able to circumvent testing and regulatory scrutiny required of U.S. vaccine producers just as is the case today.⁴⁴ Russia has since used its scientific community’s rich legacy of focusing on virology to justify skipping steps in getting the Sputnik V vaccine approved. Over a two month period prior to Putin revealing the vaccine to the world, only a few hundred test subjects composed mostly of military personnel participated in clinical trials for the drug following which “no safety or efficacy data has been published, let alone peer-reviewed”.⁴⁵ The Kremlin’s decision to bypass the “obligatory third phase of clinical trials involving tens of thousands of carefully recruited and closely monitored subjects” in favor of “early public delivery to health-care workers, teachers, and other government employees” demonstrates the overzealous nature of the Russian state’s push for a vaccine at all costs.⁴⁶ The reasons for this push are embedded within long standing objectives of Putin's foreign policy.

The enthusiasm on the part of the Kremlin serves more than only providing healthcare for its own citizens. To the Russian state, development and rollout of a successful vaccine before any other country would potentially grow into “the most powerful tool of soft power that Moscow has had in its hands for generations”.⁴⁷ The prospects of expanding Russian influence through distribution of Sputnik V within low income Latin American and African countries in desperate need of access to a vaccine certainly did its share to propel the vaccine forward in circumventing the rigors of

⁴⁴ James Franklin, “A Cold War Vaccine: Albert Sabin, Russia, and the oral polio vaccine”, *Hektoen International*, Spring 2020. <https://hekint.org/2020/05/11/a-cold-war-vaccine-albert-sabin-russia-and-the-oral-polio-vaccine/>

⁴⁵ Judy Twigg, “Vaccine Dreams and Russian Reality”, *Think Global*, 12 August 2020. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/vaccine-dreams-and-russian-reality>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Kevin Connolly, “Sputnik V: How Russia's Covid vaccine is dividing Europe”, *BBC*, 17 April 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56735931>

previously required clinical testing. Despite the lack of an endorsement from the global scientific community, over 20 countries lined up to order the vaccine.⁴⁸ Among the countries registering interest were China, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Brazil, Turkey, and the Philippines; all of whom are headed by leaders largely defined by their authoritarian tendencies.⁴⁹ At first glance, it may seem as though this is a case of solidarity among the strongmen club. But this would be misguided. Even American companies were reported as sending out feelers when news of Sputnik V burst onto the global scene.⁵⁰ While the Russian authorities were clearly eager to declare themselves as saviors of the world, it would seem as though much of the world was just as eager to find a savior. While the launch of the Sputnik V vaccine was welcome, it was accompanied by a sense of unease due to uncertainty in verifying the safety of the vaccine. Nevertheless, 39 countries have already approved Sputnik V, and, to Russia's delight, it's even being called upon to help the vaccine-strapped EU, with Hungary the first to approve the Russian vaccine for emergency use and Slovakia receiving 200,000 doses and shrugging off talk of Sputnik as a "tool" of Russian influence.⁵¹ The Slovakia case shows the conundrum of accepting Sputnik V. Having ordered the doses, its drug regulator announced that it was not able to determine the safety of a batch of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine recently delivered to Bratislava, suggesting some sort of bait and switch operation.⁵²

One of the great ironies of the Sputnik V vaccine is that, while it may be in demand abroad, it is being widely shunned in Russia. A poll by sociologists found only 30% of Russians willing to receive Sputnik V, one explanation for which is that "Russians are conservative: they don't trust their own state and they don't trust whatever can come out

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Sputnik Vaccine, "Partnerships". <https://sputnikvaccine.com/partnerships/>

⁵⁰ Twigg, *op cit.*

⁵¹ Sarah Rainsford, "Why many in Russia are reluctant to have Sputnik vaccine", *BBC*, 3 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56250456>

⁵² Medical Press, "Slovak regulator voices misgivings about Sputnik vaccine", April 8, 2021, <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-slovak-voices-misgivings-sputnik-vaccine.html>

of this state.⁵³ Data from the initial clinical trials of the Sputnik V vaccine has been scarce and unreliable. In November 2020, The Gamaleya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow released limited statistics that showed a 92% efficacy rate for the vaccine.⁵⁴ The timing of the announcement was questionable, coming just days after American pharmaceutical giant Pfizer released data from its own far more extensive clinical trials which demonstrated a 90% efficacy rate.⁵⁵ This has caused concern among experts such as Svetlana Zavidova, head of Russia's Association of Clinical Trials Organization, leaving observers afraid they took the Pfizer results and simply added 2%".⁵⁶

Russia's Orthodox Neighborhood

More specific to its own region, Russia's foreign policy toward former parts of the Soviet Union and former satellite states is a contentious one - and deliberately so. As president, Putin has inherited the realities of a past that includes the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Western democratic and capitalist influences which eventually engulfed these nations on Russia's borders. In response, he has worked to exploit the vulnerabilities of fragile democracies in its "near abroad," and destabilize them by various means, including instigating cultural proxy wars fueled by shared "civilizational links" that stretch back for centuries.⁵⁷ The aim of this destabilization tactic is to undermine Western liberal democracy as a political ideology. Beating the U.S. and Europe to the successful development, production, and distribution of a vaccine could

⁵³ Rainsford, *op cit.*

⁵⁴ Polina Ivanova, "Russia says its Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine is 92% effective", *Reuters*, 11 November, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-russia-vaccine-idUSKBN27R0ZA>

⁵⁵ Pfizer, "Pfizer and Biontech announce vaccine candidate against Covid-19 achieved success in first interim analysis from phase 3 study", 9 November 2020. <https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/pfizer-and-biontech-announce-vaccine-candidate-against>

⁵⁶ Jon Cohen, "Russia's claim of a successful COVID-19 vaccine doesn't pass the 'smell test,' critics say", *Science Magazine*, 11 November 2020. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/11/russia-s-claim-successful-Covid-19-vaccine-doesn-t-pass-smell-test-critics-say>

⁵⁷ Britannica, "Ethnic relations and Russia's 'near-abroad'", <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Ethnic-relations-and-Russias-near-abroad>

mean dimming the West's reputational allure not just in Eastern Europe, but around the globe.

Aside perhaps from the Russian language itself, among the most valuable soft power instruments held by the Kremlin is Russia's perceived role as defender of the Christian Orthodox religion in the region, where approximately half of the faith's practitioners reside.⁵⁸ Ukraine is a prime case study demonstrating Russia's ability to interfere with the domestic politics of its neighbors even beyond the obvious example of the 2014 annexation of Crimea. For many Russian-speaking Ukrainians, a Russian identity is paramount. For others, the fact that Russian is their first language does not diminish their sense of being a part of a unique Ukrainian identity. What is clear, however, is that the millennial cultural links between these two countries transcend politics and seep deeply into the national consciousness of both Ukrainians and Russians. The creation of a government-sponsored Ukrainian Orthodox Church to assist in the "de-Russification" of the Ukrainian national consciousness in 2019 speaks volumes about the Ukrainian government's wish to limit the hefty influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the region.⁵⁹ As such, the importance of the Russian state receiving the support of the Church in its Covid-19 response cannot be overstated either domestically or in its "near abroad".

Over the course of the past decade, the Church's medieval conception of *Symphonia*, a term used to describe "its ideal relationship with the Russian state," has returned to prominence in both Eastern Orthodox theological circles and as well as mainstream Russian political discourse.⁶⁰ It is clear that the Church's highly political

⁵⁸ Matthew Namee, "How Many Orthodox Christians Are in the World?", 8 July 2020.

<https://orthodoxhistory.org/2020/07/08/how-many-orthodox-christians-are-in-the-world/>

⁵⁹ Yuliya Talmazan, "Ukraine moves to create its own Orthodox church out of Russia's orbit", *NBC News*, 14 December 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/ukraine-moves-create-its-own-orthodox-church-out-russia-s-n947451>

⁶⁰ Mikhail Antonov, *Church-State Symphonia: Its Historical Development and its Applications by the Russian Orthodox Church*, Cambridge University Press, 14 December 2020.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-law-and-religion/article/abs/churchstate-symphonia-its-historical-development-and-its-applications-by-the-russian-orthodox-church/93B4C1ADB2B7EB10FBB29ADD321FE9F6>

nature is ingrained within its own history, a trend which has followed *Symphonia* from medieval times into the contemporary socio-political debate. With this in mind, it is no shock the pandemic served to create an environment in which the church-state relationship put both parties to the test.

The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state has been a key aspect of Putin's two decade-long reign, though it would be stressed during the Covid-19 period. Evocations of Soviet-era religious persecution at the hands of the state have "made priests and their flocks highly sensitive to any limits on their rituals," resulting in intense backlash in the face of lockdown restrictions which brought religious gatherings to a halt.⁶¹ The Church's response to state bans on communal worship marked the first time in Russia's post-Soviet history in which it "explicitly encouraged believers to disobey state commands" as it continued to hold church ceremonies.

However, the importance of this relationship to each party seemingly forced each to return to a level of mutually beneficial behavior that can be expected of close partners. Despite the objections from many of his priests, Patriarch Kiril of Moscow finally ordered churches in the region to close on April 13, immediately commencing canonic trials "against priests who have refuted Covid-19 and resisted restrictions".⁶² On July 3, 2020, the Russian Orthodox Church defrocked a coronavirus-denying priest by the name of Father Sergiy.⁶³ The state followed suit in reciprocating the show of goodwill by fining a journalist in November for mocking the Church over its lack of Covid-19 safety precautions, while arresting the former priest Father Sergiy the following month.⁶⁴ Cooler heads seemed to eventually prevail, with both the Church and state accepting that the

⁶¹ Mikhail Antonov, "Russian Orthodox Symphonia in the Time of Coronavirus", *BYU Law*, 24 July 2020. <https://talkabout.iclrs.org/2020/07/24/russian-orthodox-symphonia-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russian Orthodox Church defrocks coronavirus-denying monk", *Associated Press*, 3 July 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/efb53478d9ab9fd5aa8b4e2a52597dde>

⁶⁴ Jane Dalton, "Russian journalist fined for mocking orthodox church over lack of Covid measures", *The Independent*, 12 November 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russian-journalist-pichugin-court-fine-post-orthodox-church-b1721432.html>

middle of a pandemic was no time to allow a fracture in *Symphonia* to turn into a full blown break that could have ramifications extending into Russia's "near abroad".

As noted, the soft power potential of producing and distributing the world's first coronavirus vaccine enhances Russian influence into the Global South and undermines the perception of Western liberal democracy being a superior form of government. This is also true in nations in Russia's own region and is more easily absorbed than soft power based on religion. For Putin, it was a chance for Russia to demand the respect it believes it deserves on the international stage. In mid-July 2020, a group of intelligence agencies including the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), the Canadian Communication Security Establishment (CSE), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Cyber-security Infrastructure Agency (CISA), and the National Security Agency (NSA) identified a Russian state-backed hacking group which goes by names such as APT 29, The Dukes, or Cozy Bear.⁶⁵ The same group that was responsible for hacking into the servers of the Democratic National Committee during the 2016 elections targeted Western corporations developing coronavirus vaccines. Russia would also be busy creating seven websites in different languages to fight back against what the Kremlin claimed to be dishonest reporting from international media surrounding its own vaccine pursuit.⁶⁶

Damned Statistics

At the beginning of August 2020, Russia reported numbers that indicated a slow in the surging rates experienced the prior month.⁶⁷ By the end of the year, state officials themselves had conceded that the actual coronavirus death toll is "three times higher than the country's official statistics show".⁶⁸ Despite the rampant spread of the virus

⁶⁵ Chris Fox; Leo Kelion, "Coronavirus: Russian spies target Covid-19 vaccine research", *BBC*, 16 July 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53429506>

⁶⁶ Sputnik Vaccine <https://sputnikvaccine.com/>

⁶⁷ Statista Research Department, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Russia," *op cit*.

⁶⁸ Mary Ilyushina, "Russian official acknowledges actual coronavirus death toll is much higher than official figures", *CNN*, 29 December, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/29/world/russia-coronavirus-figures-higher-than-official-numbers-intl/index.html>

itself, the death toll being reported by Russia throughout 2020 was comparatively low. Despite long standing international skepticism of the Kremlin, until these revelations, the low death toll experienced in Russia may have been reasonably attributed to some aspects of the state response to the pandemic, perhaps even the increasing bounds of control exercised by its authoritarian leader, akin to Chinese Communist Party's ability to implement draconian, though effective, lockdown measures. Again, the issue of legitimacy arises regarding reported viral statistics from autocratic governments that lack both genuine democratic controls and effective civil society contestation. Calculations based on data released in December 2020 suggest that Russia had a true coronavirus death toll nearing 186,000, which would place Russia as the world's third leading country in this grisly statistic.⁶⁹ Counting Covid-related deaths has been a tricky issue world-wide, with all governments, democratic or autocratic, having incentives to report case numbers that are as low as possible to appease both domestic and international concerns. However, Russia's method blatantly "differs from World Health Organization guidelines, which states that all deaths related to Covid-19 should be counted unless there is 'a clear alternative cause that cannot be related' to the disease".⁷⁰ Reports from international watchdog organizations have indicated that in up to one third of coronavirus fatalities in Russia, the cause of death is being purposely misdiagnosed.⁷¹ Indeed, at least 300,000 more people died over the course of 2020 than official totals have indicated and Russia's low reported Covid-19 death does not correspond to the 28% increase in deaths across Russia during the pandemic.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ WHO, "International Guidelines for Certification and Classification (coding) of Covid-19 as Cause of Death", April 16, 2020

https://www.who.int/classifications/icd/Guidelines_Cause_of_Death_COVID-19.pdf

⁷¹ BBC, "Russian Covid deaths three times the official toll", *BBC*, December 29, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55474028>

⁷² Anton Troianovski, "'You Can't Trust Anyone': Russia's Hidden Covid Toll Is an Open Secret", *New York Times*, 10 April 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/10/world/europe/covid-russia-death.html>

August would be the final month of 2020 in which Russia could possibly claim relatively low case numbers. The upward trajectory began during the final week of the month, during which a surge in Russia led to the country holding the second highest infection rates globally. By the end of the following month, Russia had both lived through its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic, which at this point had reportedly claimed a total of 22,966 lives in the country and dealt with a record rise in infection rates.⁷³ This was an acute sign of things to come. New records in confirmed covid cases came in October. And again, in November. And again, in December. By the end of 2020 Russia had 3,131,550 cases of the coronavirus.⁷⁴

Conclusions

Analysis of the Russian state's first year of behavior both domestically and internationally in the Covid-era has revealed a Kremlin stratagem that prioritizes long-standing political aims of its autocratic leader in Vladimir Putin over the requirements of fighting a global pandemic. Among these aims are his personal ambitions domestically, as well as his objective to see Russia rise to prominence on the international stage. Autocracy is not only a domestic political phenomenon, but it also leaks into foreign policy and healthcare policy. On October 14, 2020 Russia approved its second covid vaccine, EpiVacCorona. While every other country in the world was still taking every precaution in rigorously testing their own vaccines, EpiVacCorona, like its predecessor, bypassed standard Phase III testing and was rushed to approval by the Kremlin.⁷⁵ As an autocratic leader with the desire to maintain his grip on power, Putin believes he can write his own narrative and considers himself to be free of the constraints felt by his democratic counterparts who, for example, must abide by constitutionally-enforced term

⁷³ Peter Beaumont, "Global report: Russia reels from record rise in Covid infections", *The Guardian*, 29 Decemeber 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/13/global-report-russia-reels-from-record-rise-in-covid-infections>

⁷⁴ Statista Research Department, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Russia," *op cit*.

⁷⁵ Reuters, "Russia approves second COVID-19 vaccine after preliminary trials", *Reuters*, October 14, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/14/russia-approves-second-Covid-19-vaccine-after-preliminary-trials.html>

limits. One point of similarity between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin was the tactic to shift the onus of taking unpopular decisions and sharing bad news with their people to regional leaders. Inheriting the Soviet Union's faith in science, Putin remains "beholden to the imperatives of fact and science" in a way that Trump was curiously able to avoid.⁷⁶

There is a lack of credibility about the behavior of autocratic states in the collection and representation of data, especially as it relates to pressing global initiatives. The shortcomings of the Russian state have been clear in the context of the global pandemic, including its projection of disputed numbers whether it be about the number of cases, vaccine trial data or referendum results. Within an autocratic state, the consequences for attempting to spread blatant disinformation is considerably less than within the domestic settings of its democratic counterparts. However, while international skepticism over Russia's data dissemination may not serve as a major threat to his power at home, it may undermine his foreign policy objective of returning Russia to superpower status.

An autocratic state empowered by AI does not necessarily mean that draconian surveillance correlates to virus surge prevention. As Russia entered 2021, Putin's political bluff of a response to the pandemic has yet to be called. The gamble may yet lead to increased skepticism about the major role Russia wishes to play, now or in the future, in international relations, ironically reflecting domestic skepticism of the role of the state. With Putin's goal of returning Russia to a place of global prominence in mind, it is difficult to see a way in which his response to the pandemic has served as anything but a roadblock in changing perceptions of Russia on an international scale. One thing, however, is for certain: President Putin is going nowhere anytime soon.

⁷⁶Twigg, *op cit.*

SOUTH AFRICA FACES COVID-19

Delaney Charydczak

At some time in late 2019, the zoonotic transmission occurred, silently and insidiously. By the last day of the year, Chinese hospitals in Wuhan were treating dozens of cases of a new type of pneumonia. On January 11, China openly reported its first confirmed death from the new virus. As February came, so did the first new virus deaths occur outside China. This was also when the World Health Organisation officially named the novel coronavirus that emerged in 2019, Covid-19. By then, cases were emerging in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of Asia. The response has seen a significant shift in daily lives with simple routines interrupted, in person school halted, mask-wearing mandated, and lockdowns imposed. The government of South Africa followed the example of others and issued stay-at-home orders as well as various mandates. The impact was experienced differentially but extended to virtually all aspects of public and private lives.

The Virus Arrives Quickly

The first confirmed case in South Africa was on March 5, 2020, from a thirty-eight-year-old man who had come back from a trip to northern Italy. South Africa instituted its first major lockdown on March 27, 2020, just 22 days later. Even before the lockdown, capacity limits were placed on establishments and social gatherings. The initial lockdown was to last from March 27 to April 16, with stringent enforcement rules set in place. Residents were only allowed out to obtain essential items such as food, medicine, and fuel. Most indoor gatherings were banned as well as non-essential travel, in-person

schools, and religious gatherings. Borders were closed. In a departure from the practice of other countries, the sale of alcohol and tobacco products was suspended in the hope that it would prevent people from venturing outside to obtain non-essential items. The ban on alcohol also had another motive behind it: it was supposed to aid the already-overwhelmed medical facilities by lessening the number of alcohol-related incidents with which they would need to deal.¹

South Africa experienced a significant rise in cases before the three-week lockdown, but cases dropped after the stay-at-home order was put into place. On April 9, President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the country, emphasizing “if we end the lockdown too soon or too abruptly, we risk a massive and uncontrollable resurgence of the disease”.² A week after the President’s statement, the lockdown in the country was extended for another two weeks.

Even with a significant number of confirmed cases, it was nevertheless perplexing to epidemiologists why the cases were relatively low in South Africa compared to the United States and Europe. There may be several different reasons. The first reason may be linked to the median age in the country which is quite low. The United States has an older demographic including a significant number residing in elderly homes. They constitute a vulnerable population living in circumstances in which it is difficult to stop community transmission. South Africa has a considerably smaller number of elderly people, who live spread out in the community, with many being more isolated in rural area in the country, so the factors favoring community transmission are mitigated.

Another reason for the low case numbers in South Africa was the national adherence to the Covid-19 protection measures. A poll conducted by “Partnership for Evidence-Based Covid-19 Response” illustrated that the vast majority of the 24,000 adults surveyed fully adhered to the Covid-19 protection measures. The measures studied in

¹ Shey Wiysonge, “South Africa's War on COVID-19”, *Think Global Health*, Council on Foreign Relations, April 20, 2020, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/south-africas-war-Covid-19>.

² *Ibid.*

the survey ranged from washing hands and wearing facemasks to staying home and avoiding public gatherings and places of worship.³

A final reason that South Africa was able to keep its case numbers low was the rapidity of the response after the first confirmed case. With the Ebola and HIV epidemic that swept the country in years prior, the country understood that speed was essential in the race to contain the virus.

The lockdown was initially met with little resistance, with most people observing its requirements. It was, however, coming at a steep cost to the economy with 2.2 million jobs lost. The President nevertheless extended the lockdown. In addition, the ban on tobacco and alcohol sales became increasingly unpopular and there was talk of resuming sales. President Ramaphosa announced that sales would resume, but the decision was quickly reversed by Minister Dlamini-Zuma, responsible for the lockdown rules in the country. Not only was this a controversial decision, but it had the effect of promoting illicit cigarette trade, the looting of liquor stores, and an increase in pineapple prices from which beer was fermented. And the fact that the decision was taken by the spouse of the disgraced former President, Jacob Zuma, added to political tensions inside the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The extension of the lockdown past April 16, laid bare the rawness of feelings towards it. People became ever more apprehensive of the economic costs and ever more resentful of its enforcement through the criminal law, reminding some of the nation's apartheid history.

The Grip of History and Geography

South Africa spans the southernmost region of Africa, bordering Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, as well as enclosing Lesotho and Eswatini. It has a population of 62 million. South Africa has three capital cities: the executive is in Pretoria, the judicial branch in Bloemfontein, and the legislature is in Cape Town. The

³ Anne Soy, "Coronavirus in Africa: Five Reasons Why Covid-19 Has Been Less Deadly Than Elsewhere", *BBC News*. October 8, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54418613>.

transition from apartheid to democracy came slowly and painfully, culminating in the first democratic election with universal suffrage in which Nelson Mandela was elected president. South African democracy has been severely tested ever since though with resentment at the slow pace of economic reform, anger at the corruption of the ruling elite, and the enduring monopoly of power of the ANC.

The first settlement by the Dutch in southern Africa was in today's Cape Town in the seventeenth century. Racial conflict began in the 1770's between the Dutch settlers, who became known as Afrikaners, and the Bantu-speaking chiefdoms sharing in the area. Racial relations worsened at the beginning of the 1900s with the creation of the Union of South Africa, a predominantly white union. In 1912, the ANC, comprised of predominantly black people, was founded to oppose the exclusion of black people from suffrage. The apartheid ideology was articulated in 1948 cementing in place an authoritarian regime with segregationist policies.⁴ This was guided by the pro-Afrikaner National Party which managed the policy of "white domination over a black majority".⁵ The goal of the then-South African government was to divide the population into tribal nations with their own "homeland" while maintaining the privileges for people in "white areas" and forcing black people in those areas into urban slums, known as townships.⁶ The United Nations was at the forefront of the fight against apartheid, with the United States and the United Kingdom offering some protection to the regime on the flimsy grounds of its anti-communism. But with the eclipse of the threat of global communism, the tide turned and in 1986, the US Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act and then overrode the veto of President Reagan. The act set forth a number of economic sanctions against the apartheid government including the prohibition of South African imports, prohibition on providing government assistance to South Africa, and

⁴ Government of South Africa, "History: South African Government", South African Government. 2021. <https://www.gov.za/about-sa/history#>.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, "South Africa - United States Department Of State", United States Department Of State, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/south-africa/>.

⁶ Government of South Africa, *op cit*.

the prohibition on air transportation to South Africa.⁷ In addition, the Act provided ways to relieve or aid victims of apartheid. The writing was on the wall for the apartheid regime and the process of transition began. As noted, in April 1994, South Africa saw its first election with universal suffrage and elected President Nelson Mandela.⁸

The stringency of the lockdown rules and enforcement reminded some of the apartheid regime. Among the rules was a prohibition on refusing testing, treatment, isolation, or quarantine enforced by fine or imprisonment or both. Citizens could also legally be held in isolation or quarantine under certain circumstances.⁹ Staunton, Swanepoel, and Labuschaigne explain that, although put into effect to aide in deterring the virus, these restrictions infringed on freedoms reminiscent to infringements under the apartheid regime. Understanding the sentiment, the President avoided the word “lockdown” where possible.¹⁰ It is not surprising that when rumors circulated of plans to relocate individuals in overcrowded cities, it brought back memories of forceful removal under the apartheid regime.

Relocation became a very unpopular decision for the people of South Africa and only worsened the socioeconomic divisions that existed in the country. People said it was easy for the rich to isolate themselves from the virus because they lived in a big house on acres of land by themselves or with a nuclear family. Most people, including most black people, were less fortunate and lived in crowded conditions with extended families. Domestic workers who worked in these mansions became exposed when wealthy travelers returned from Europe or Asia carrying the virus. The domestic workers, using crowded public transportation to and from work, introduced the virus into their crowded homes in their crowded townships. Yunus Moosa, a chief infectious disease official,

⁷ United States Congress, “H.R.4868 - 99Th Congress (1985-1986): Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act Of 1986”, United States Congress, 2021. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/4868>.

⁸ Government of South Africa, *op cit*.

⁹ Ciara Staunton, Carmen Swanepoel, and Melodie Labuschaigne, “Between a rock and a hard place: COVID-19 and South Africa’s response”, *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, Volume 7, Issue 1, January-June 2020, Isaa052, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/ljaa052>

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

explained that “once the virus reached South Africa’s poor densely populated townships - a legacy of decades of oppressive white minority rule - it spread quickly”.¹¹ This also became extremely difficult when social distancing rules were put into effect. People could not separate themselves and it was not uncommon to find people hanging out outside even when rules prohibited it during lockdown. This provides a stark example of the differential impact of the virus based on socio-economic position.

The Prevalence of Violence and Corruption

The use of security personnel for lockdown enforcement using military-style drills became unpopular.¹² There were several claims that police killed unarmed people, including children, during questioning of why they were outside in breach of lockdown rules. The police explained that, in one incident, they killed a child during a confrontation with gang members.¹³

Another worsening problem was gender-based violence and violence against children during lockdown. Gender-based violence was as harsh for some as a second pandemic and has been described as “an expression of gender inequality and toxic masculinity”.¹⁴ In the midst the lockdown, women and teenage girls had to carry the burden of abuse or sexual abuse. Amnesty International specifically states that “the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted an escalation of gender-based violence against women and girls in Southern Africa.”¹⁵ Women typically did not seek help or were not able to seek help. Faced with fighting the virus, authorities gave lower priority to protecting

¹¹ Tim Cocks, “How Inequality and Poverty Undermined South Africa's COVID Response”, *Reuters*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-safrica-response-a/how-inequality-and-poverty-undermined-south-africas-covid-response-idUSKCN24W1OL>.

¹² Emmanuel Sekyere, Narnia Bohler-Muller, and Charles Hongoro. “The Impact Of COVID-19 In South Africa”, *Wilson Center*, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/impact-covid-19-south-africa>.

¹³ Delali Sakpa, “In Africa, Concerns Over Rising Police Brutality.” *Deutsche Welle*. September 7, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/in-africa-concerns-over-rising-police-brutality/a-54845922>.

¹⁴ Judy Dlamini, Judy, “Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19.” *Critical Sociology*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520975465>.

¹⁵ Amnesty International. “Southern Africa: Homes Become Dangerous Place for Women and Girls During COVID-19 Lockdown”, *Amnesty International*. February 9, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/southern-africa-homes-become-dangerous-place-for-women-and-girls-during-covid19-lockdown/>.

women and girls. Even in normal times, women are stigmatized when reporting this type of abuse. Police may even consider this abuse as a “family matter”. For these reasons, there is a distrust of police officers and public officials who are supposed to provide protection for women and girls.

The question needs to be posed whether, during the time of the pandemic, police did more harm than good. Was there police brutality in enforcing lockdown rules? According to a 2019 report by Corruption Watch, South Africa’s police are the most corrupt public servants in the country - with abuse of power and bribery being common.¹⁶ This highlights the prevalence of corruption in South Africa. Some people refer to corruption in South Africa as a form of state capture. According to Neal Arun, state capture refers to “a form of corruption in which businesses and politicians conspire to influence a country’s decision-making process to advance their own interests.”¹⁷ State capture, or the perception of it, will mitigate the effectiveness of a government to deal with crises which require the cooperation of the population.

Corruption was endemic in the administration of former President Jacob Zuma. The economy no doubt was adversely affected by this level of corruption. Zuma and family members had an economic partnership with the Gupta family, three brothers of Indian extraction. The brothers owned a number of lucrative businesses and employed several Zuma family members in senior management positions as well as benefiting them in other direct ways. In exchange, President Zuma took decisions that advanced the Gupta brothers’ economic interests. Zuma protected himself through his power to appoint the head of police and the head of the anti-corruption agency.¹⁸ In addition, President Zuma was accused of rape, though he was acquitted. On March 16, 2018, it was confirmed by the director of public prosecutions that Zuma would face 18 charges of

¹⁶ Sakpa, *op cit*.

¹⁷ Neil Arun, “State Capture: Zuma, The Guptas, and the Sale of South Africa”, *BBC News*. July 15, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48980964>.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

corruption, including more than 700 counts of fraud and money laundering such as one concerning a French company involved in South African arms procurement.¹⁹

Has corruption undermined South Africa's response to the pandemic? According to sources that remained anonymous, money that was allocated to purchase PPE supplies and money allocated for schools and hospitals was not used for these purposes.²⁰ There have also been accusations that employers have been keeping relief money that was supposed to aid their employees during the time of the pandemic.²¹ Employers have also been making false claims on behalf of employees that no longer work for them and for individuals that never worked for them in the first place.²² One wonders if they have been getting away with it through bribery. Are they bribing inspectors to look the other way so they can fraudulently claim the employee relief benefits?

Is the healthcare system essential in the response to Covid-19 also compromised by corruption? When Covid-19 emerged in South Africa, healthcare facilities were unprepared, recalling the state of affairs when HIV first appeared in the country. There were inadequate supplies, insufficient doctors and nurses, and few intensive care rooms available in health care facilities. In relation to HIV, it took years of consciousness raising and the passing from office of President Thabo Mbeki, who was skeptical of the relationship between HIV and AIDS, to finally arrive at an appropriate government response to the HIV epidemic ravaging the country. Healthcare facilities were unprepared to deal with the intensive care needs of seriously ill Covid-19 patients. One exasperated nurse explained, "there's no space anywhere".²³ Patients were forced to wait for days in waiting rooms, in anticipation of a bed or room opening up in the intensive

¹⁹ John Campbell, "Amid COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa, Zuma One Step Closer To Justice". *Council On Foreign Relations*. May 1, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/amid-Covid-19-pandemic-south-africa-zuma-one-step-closer-justice>.

²⁰ Sadie Brown, "Whistleblowers Report COVID-19 Corruption in South Africa", *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, 2021, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/13777-whistleblowers-report-Covid-19-corruption-in-south-africa>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Cocks, *op cit.*

care unit (ICU), at times being given oxygen while sitting upright in chairs. In some facilities, people were only given a certain amount of access to oxygen, often as short as 30 minutes, because of insufficient supply. In addition, healthcare facilities had difficulty providing adequate food and water for patients in need.

The healthcare systems attempted to draw on the lessons learned when dealing with the HIV epidemic by trying to catch the infections early. However, again, the lack of resources, space, and doctors and nurses affected their progress. Covid-19 was progressing too rapidly, and testing overwhelmed the capacity of laboratories. In addition, medical staff lacked proper supplies of PPE. The healthcare system reflected the socioeconomic divide in the country. Healthcare access is easier to attain for wealthier individuals. The system remains divided between the people that can afford the private insurance and the overburdened public health system that caters mostly to Black citizens, bearing in mind that only 17% have medical insurance.²⁴ Private hospitals attended to some patients that public facilities couldn't handle, but this did not resolve the problem.

A New Variant

The country had initially managed to keep the case numbers significantly lower than most others. The announcements that effective vaccines were imminently available from Moderna, Pfizer, Astra-Zeneca, and Johnson and Johnson, appeared to signal the end of the pandemic was in sight. However, as the roll-out of the vaccine began for high-risk individuals and healthcare workers, a Covid-19 variant emerged in South Africa. First identified in Nelson Mandela Bay, the new strain 20H/501Y.V2 was dated back to October 2020. It also crossed two months later to Zambia and other countries, and it is now the predominant variant in that area. It is considered more contagious and transmissible. It is not clear whether current vaccines will protect against this new strain. The evidence provided by the US CDC suggests that a mutation in the proteins of the strain may affect the neutralization of antibodies from the vaccines. On March 11, 2021,

²⁴ *Ibid.*

there was news of Minnesota having its first confirmed case of the new strain from South Africa.

Lessons Learned

Historical and geographic factors played a significant role in how the country responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The history of apartheid continued to cast its shadow. Many considered that shadow darkening overhead in the harsh enforcement of lockdown and the consideration of relocation measures. And the human geography of South Africa, with its continuing racial divisions and the resulting differential capacity to protect oneself from the virus, also had a pronounced effect. Poor people who are invariably black people thus were more vulnerable to the disease. The next question would be whether they would also be disadvantaged in the vaccine roll out. As one official noted, “unequal vaccine apartheid means 9 out of 10 people won’t get inoculated this year and may not until 2023.”²⁵

A downturn in the South African economy will also have a differential impact. The government saw no choice but to extend the lockdown, causing millions of jobs to be lost. As time passed, the government fine-tuned aspects of the lockdown, allowing certain economic activity to resume.²⁶ Like other countries, South Africa is now in a race to vaccinate its people so that the economy can resume fully and lift the welfare of the people.

South Africa is in a strong position to isolate itself from international arrivals, as it did once the extent of the pandemic was understood, but in a weaker position to deal with informal migration from neighboring countries. But the vector for this pandemic was different from previous episodes like HIV and Ebola. Covid-19 was initially spread

²⁵ CBS News, "South Africa Variant's Deadly Spread Highlights Risks of Unequal COVID 'Vaccine Apartheid'". *CBS News*. February 18, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/south-africa-Covid-variant-pfizer-vaccine-spread-shows-risk-vaccination-apartheid/>.

²⁶ South African Department of Health, "COVID-19 Risk Adjusted Strategy", COVID-19 South African Online Portal, South African Department of Health, 2020, <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/Covid-19-risk-adjusted-strategy/>

though international travel, rather than through community practices, and the quick action to close borders was effective. Once it entered the broader community, however, community transmission was accentuated by the crowded conditions in the townships. But it did not spread as quickly in the less densely populated rural sector which has the largest employment in South Africa.²⁷ Rural living and youth demographics are factors that tend to lessen the severity of the pandemic.

Although many people praised the country for one of the strictest lockdowns to slow the spread of virus, it nevertheless met with some resistance and criticism. Sean Mfundza Muller argues that this drastic measure was unnecessary.²⁸ According to this view, the country acted too rapidly and thus constrained its later options. The tradeoff between anti-disease lockdown measures and economic factors was not properly weighed. Further, the objective of flattening the curve was not met as the hospitals were filled beyond capacity. What can be said, however, is that after the damage done by Mbeki's rejection of medical science, the Ramaphosa government was deeply reliant on medical advice and followed it regardless of other costs.²⁹

The government followed eight overlapping stages in attempting to manage the pandemic.³⁰ The first stage focused on preparation, including facilities for laboratory testing. The second stage involved the president declaring a state of emergency and discussing aspects of the lockdown. During this stage, travel bans were put in place, large gatherings were cancelled, and social distancing was required. Stage three entailed

²⁷ Channing Arndt, Rob Davies, and James Thurlow, Rep. *Urbanization, Structural Transformation and Rural-Urban Linkages in South Africa*, South Africa National Treasury, April 2018. https://csp.treasury.gov.za/Resource%20_Centre/Conferences/Documents/Urbanization%20Review%20Papers/Paper%203%20-%20RSA%20Urbanization.pdf.

²⁸ Sean Mfundza Muller, "COVID-19 In South Africa: A Critical Assessment of the First 90 Days," *Economy & Business, The Conversation*, December 7, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/Covid-19-in-south-africa-a-critical-assessment-of-the-first-90-days-151107>.

²⁹ Judd Devermont and Topaz Mukulu. "South Africa's Bold Response To The Covid-19 Pandemic," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, May 12, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/south-africas-bold-response-covid-19-pandemic>.

³⁰ Salim S. Abdool Karim, "The South African Response to the Pandemic." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 382, no. 24 (2020): e95–e95. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc2014960>.

measures to prop up the declining economy. Stage four involved sending trained healthcare workers into the field and into people's houses. Stage five involved locating areas with localized outbreaks or hot spots and implementing preventative measures in those areas to arrest further spread. Stage six focused on hospital care for severe cases. Stage seven dealt with rules concerning funerals. And stage eight involved staying vigilant regarding the disease and monitoring case activity for the future.

The Ramaphosa government thus acted lawfully and logically, following medical advice and taking difficult decisions affecting jobs and economic prospects. In doing so, it carried the weight of the past in terms of the shadow of apartheid, the wealth inequality in the country, and governmental failures in post-Mandela times. There may well be valid criticisms to be made. But it cannot be said that democracy impeded the government's response. The initial acceptance of the lockdown showed a nation that had trust in its government. Perhaps the harsh enforcement measures showed a government with less trust in its people.

Chapter 8

**TAIWAN: A NEAR-PERFECT RESPONSE
TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

Ryan Prieto

Taiwan's government takes charge

Taiwan reported its first case of Covid-19 on January 21, 2020 from Taoyuan International Airport.¹ The infected individual, a 55-year-old Taiwanese citizen, had contracted the disease before her flight while working in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the original epicenter of Covid-19.² Taiwanese health officials acted quickly to implement the epidemiological protocols that they had prepared prior to the arrival of Covid-19 in the country.³

The passenger, after having displayed symptoms that matched the virus, was quarantined and eventually tested positive for Covid-19.⁴ The Taiwan Center for Disease Control (Taiwan CDC), in collaboration with the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), later announced that recent arrivals traveling from China and exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19 would be required to quarantine for 14 days.⁵ Furthermore, health authorities assigned additional medical professionals to all its international entrances to bolster compliance.⁶ They handed out numerous brochures to inform the general public of Covid-19 and levied hefty fines up to NT\$150,000 (US\$5,296), for those individuals who were contact-traced after having failed to report their symptoms.⁷ Meanwhile, those

¹ "Taiwan confirms first new virus case" *Taipei Times*. 22 January 2020. <http://bit.ly/38PAUOq>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

individuals that had scheduled or who were already on a visit to China were strongly encouraged to wear masks and avoid situations that would increase the likelihood of catching Covid-19.⁸ Then, throughout February and March, a series of edicts were passed that completely closed off travel into Taiwan for most individuals.⁹

Could this degree of government activism successfully prevent the spread of Covid-19? The data suggests that those measures were decisive. As of March 2021, Taiwan reported 928 confirmed cases of Covid-19, nine of which have resulted in the loss of life.¹⁰ However, only 68 of those confirmed cases of Covid-19 resulted from community spread.¹¹ Clearly, Taiwan was able to avoid the deep penetration of Covid-19 that afflicted other nations around the world, in large part because of the measures taken by the government at the start of the pandemic. However, government measures were not the sole contributor to Taiwan's success against Covid-19. The Taiwanese health authorities had well-developed Covid-19 policies, but the citizens of Taiwan responded to each new policy with an understanding and willingness to implement any measure which could increase their community's safety during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹² For example, when the Taiwanese health authorities made a steady supply of face masks readily available at 6,336 community pharmacies, the citizens of Taiwan, numbering roughly 23 million, responded by purchasing a total of 39 million face masks per month.¹³

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Starting February 7, 2020, the Republic of China (Taiwan) will implement entry restrictions and visa control measures on foreign nationals who have visited or resided in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the previous 14 days" *Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 4 February 2020. <https://bit.ly/3vA2g5e>; "Taiwan to bar foreign nationals from entering the country starting March 19 in response to the continued spread of COVID-19" *Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 18 March 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ln54xR>.

¹⁰ Taiwan Center for Disease Control. "COVID-19 (2019-nCoV)." *Taiwan Center for Disease Control*. 15 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/3vyYYyS>.

¹¹ Taiwan National Infectious Disease Statistics System. "Severe Pneumonia with Novel Pathogens (COVID-19), Indigenous, Nationwide, Year 2021- Year 2021" *Taiwan National Infectious Disease Statistics System*. 17 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/3cEzM1v>.

¹² Hsien-Ming Lin, "Lessons from Taiwan's coronavirus response" *East Asia Forum*. 2 April 2020. <https://bit.ly/2OxYuIV>.

¹³ Che-Huei Lin, Lin, Ya-Wen. Wang, Jong-Yi. Lin, Ming-Hung. "The pharmaceutical practice of mask distribution by pharmacists in Taiwan's community pharmacies under the Mask Real-Name System in response to the COVID-19 outbreak" *United States National Library of Medicine*. 19 October 2020.

This statistic is a positive indicator that the Taiwanese health authorities were able to rely on citizens to follow proper Covid-19 protocols, well before the prospect of security created by the emerging Covid-19 vaccines.¹⁴

Taiwan is no different from the rest of the world in its desire for safe and effective vaccines to officially end the Covid-19 pandemic, and its government has invested significant sums in purchasing and creating new vaccines.¹⁵ Taiwan originally purchased five million doses of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine¹⁶ and then purchased five million doses of the Pfizer-Biotech vaccine.¹⁷ These purchases have bolstered a national vaccine stockpile that already included vaccines from AstraZeneca through the COVAX global program.¹⁸ Further, hedging against delays to the shipment of those vaccines, Taiwan has completed clinical trials on two homemade Covid-19 vaccines.¹⁹ Taiwan has likely secured sufficient vaccines to vaccinate its entire population. Like the rest of the world, Taiwan is banking on the effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccines. Although those vaccines have shown promise against the original strain of Covid-19, there is no guarantee that the vaccines will be as effective against potential Covid-19 variants.²⁰ Therefore, Taiwan has continued to implement various protective measures for the foreseeable future.

While the case of Taiwan is a role model for the rest of the world, China has continued to deny Taiwan membership of the World Health Organization (WHO) where

<http://bit.ly/2Nq1J4q>; "Explore All Countries - Taiwan." *The World Factbook*. 3 March, 2021.

<http://bit.ly/3bRie2R>.

¹⁴ BBC. "COVID-19: Virus 'success' Taiwan to keep restrictions despite vaccine" *British Broadcast Company*. 11 December 2020. <http://bbc.in/3qUERYB>.

¹⁵ Siladitya Ray, "Taiwan Says Deal To Buy 5 Million Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccines On Hold, Hints At Pressure From China" *Forbes*. 17 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/30OR1HX>.

¹⁶ Reuters. "Moderna to supply COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan and Colombia." *Reuters*. 9 February 2021. <http://reut.rs/3qOmNyI>.

¹⁷ Siladitya, *op cit*.

¹⁸ Reuters, "Moderna to supply COVID-19 vaccine," *op cit*.

¹⁹ Sarah Newey, "Cuba and Taiwan push for homegrown COVID vaccines amid frosty relations with the world's superpowers" *Telegraph*. 15 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/30QHUUW>.

²⁰ Lisa Lockerd Maragakis and Gabor David Kelen. "Is the COVID-19 Vaccine Safe?" *John Hopkins Medicine*. 24 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/3bVcxB1>.

it could have usefully shared its example.²¹ Nevertheless, Taiwan has organized numerous virtual events to share its success regarding Covid-19 to various nations and regional organizations.²² Additionally, Taiwan has exported millions of surplus medical supplies and has collaborated with several diplomatic allies, most notably the United States, European Union, and Australia, in support of many types of Covid-19 research.²³ So, Taiwan has unquestionably assisted the global community by circumventing China's hostility.²⁴ Governments alone cannot tackle a pandemic of this nature. There are other factors at play. The following sections will examine issues of politics, culture, and geography.

Pan-Green and Pan-Blue politics

Taiwan adopted its constitution on December 25, 1946, establishing a democratic republic with a central government and local governments.²⁵ The Central Government of Taiwan is composed of five branches: Executive Yuan, Legislative Yuan, Judicial Yuan, Examination Yuan, and Control Yuan.²⁶ The role of the first three branches is self-evident. The last two branches are less common among contemporary democracies.²⁷ The Examination Yuan is responsible for confirming the qualifications and providing human resource services to current and former Taiwanese civil servants.²⁸ The Control Yuan is

²¹ Chao Deng, "Taiwan Stopped COVID-19s Spread, but Can't Talk About It at WHO Meeting" *Wall Street Journal*. 12 November 2020. <http://on.wsj.com/3ePYVsw>.

²² Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare. "Taiwan Can Help, and Taiwan is Helping!" *Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare*. 14 May 2020. <http://bit.ly/3log5Pv>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ BBC. "What is the 'One China' policy?" *British Broadcast Company*. 10 February 2017. <http://bbc.in/3bXI8SN>.

²⁵ Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan). "Constitution of the Republic of China" *Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)*. 25 December 1946. <http://bit.ly/3vACxcM>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ European Ombudsman. "The Role of Ombudsman Institutions in Open Government." *European Ombudsman*. 9 July 2018. <https://bit.ly/3rk0ge5>.

²⁸ Examination Yuan of ROC, "Foreword." *Examination Yuan of ROC*. 19 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/3lQH6LL>.

responsible for auditing and/or investigating government officials, ultimately applying corrective measures to address any problems discovered as a result of the inquiry.²⁹

The local governments of Taiwan have varying structures approved by the Legislative Yuan.³⁰ Local governments have a range of powers in hierarchical order cascading from the central government to provincial governments and then to municipalities (*hsien*).³¹ Understanding the responsibilities of each government entity is only a part of the puzzle. This is because those government entities, even with the best of frameworks, can only operate within the context of the political system. So, can a pattern be discerned as to which political party or parties were most effective in managing Taiwan's Covid-19 measures? Did political parties work cooperatively because of the circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Executive Yuan and Legislative Yuan have been controlled by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) throughout the entirety of the Covid-19 pandemic.³² But the DPP only ascended to prominence relatively recently.³³ Its largest rival, the Kuomintang (KMT), controlled the Executive Yuan and Legislative Yuan for decades, first in a one-party system prior to 1986 when all other political parties were banned³⁴, and then as the dominant party until finally ceding power to the DPP's Chen Shui-bian in the 2000 presidential elections. Power has alternated between the two parties since that time and, despite the KMT's recent set-backs at the national level, it still has considerable influence, including in relation to the implementation of Taiwan's Covid-19 measures. As the official opposition party of Taiwan, the KMT has the ability to freeze bills in the

²⁹ The Control Yuan Republic of China (Taiwan). "Our Powers" *The Control Yuan Republic of China (Taiwan)*. 23 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/3f1vJ25>.

³⁰ Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan). "Constitution"

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Government Portal of the Republic of China (Taiwan) "Political System" *Government Portal of the Republic of China (Taiwan)*. <http://bit.ly/3vCTnb5>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ John F. Cooper, "The Evolution of Political Parties in Taiwan" *Asian Affairs: An American Review*. Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 1989: p.3-21. <https://bit.ly/3s0YgbM>.

Legislative Yuan for one month.³⁵ And, in the 2018 local elections, the KMT won 13 of 22 divisions.³⁶ Aside from the DPP and KMT, the only other political parties with some influence are the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), the New Power Party (NPP), and the Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP).³⁷ These political parties have tended to join in political coalitions with either the DPP or KMT to have their voices heard in the Legislative Yuan.³⁸ This pattern was repeated at the local level.³⁹ The result has been the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue Coalitions.⁴⁰ The main political parties in the Pan-Green Coalition are the DPP, NPP, and TSP,⁴¹ while the main political parties in the Pan-Blue Coalition are the KMT and TPP.⁴²

As is to be expected in a system of alternating political power that Taiwan has had since 2000, politics is contentious and, at time, unruly. The KMT has a "born-to-rule" mentality based on its storied history. It was founded on November 24, 1894 as the Revive China Society (RCS) by Dr. Sun Yat-sen.⁴³ The original purpose of the KMT was to dismantle the moribund Qing Dynasty.⁴⁴ As a scholar, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wished to replace the Qing Dynasty with a governmental structure focused on his *Three Principles of the People: Nationalism, Democracy, and Livelihood*.⁴⁵ While the KMT succeeded in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty, Dr. Sun Yat-sen had few opportunities to govern

³⁵ Sean Lin, "Virus Outbreak: KMT delays final review of COVID-19 act" *Taipei Times*. 15 April 2020. <http://bit.ly/30UYxAS>.

³⁶ Richard Bush, "Taiwan's local elections, explained" *Brookings Institute*. 5 December 2018. <http://brook.gs/3qYkrOl>.

³⁷ Government Portal of the Republic of China (Taiwan), *op cit*.

³⁸ Gunter Schubert, "Time for a Genuine Third Party, Not Another Green or Blue" *Taiwan Insight – University of Nottingham*. 16 December 2019. <http://bit.ly/38ShE2X>.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

⁴¹ Taiwan News, "Pro-independence coalition likely to form in support of Tsai." *Taiwan News*. 11 August 2019. <http://bit.ly/3eMgtWE>.

⁴² Brain Hioe, "The Taiwan People's Party Should Not Be Mistaken for Anything but a Conservative, Pan-Blue Party" *New Bloom*. 23 December 2019. <http://bit.ly/3vKYHcu>.

⁴³ OF TAIWAN, "Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)" <http://bit.ly/31aTr3u>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Audrey Wells, "Sun's Three Principles of the People: The Principle of Nationalism" In *The Political Thought of Sun Yat-Sen*. Ed. Palgrave Macmillan. London: Springer, 2001. <https://bit.ly/30YESjr>.

because of a resistance by powerful warlords.⁴⁶ It was during this period of time that Dr. Sun Yat-sen met Chiang Kai-shek who was to become the eventual successor to Dr. Sun Yat-sen.⁴⁷ Chiang Kai-shek took over the KMT after Dr. Sun Yat-sen's death on March 12, 1925.⁴⁸ Chiang Kai-shek would go on to rule China for several years, but eventually succumbed to the Chinese Communist Party in the aftermath of World War II.⁴⁹ It was because of defeat by the Chinese Communist Party that Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan and took over the running of the island while claiming to remain president of China.⁵⁰ The political cleavages that developed in Taiwan and were eventually allowed electoral expression turned on both identity and political grounds. The KMT represented the establishment from the pre-communist government of China that had fled *en masse* to Taiwan and continued to believe in "one China". The DPP was more representative of the local islanders and was less invested in "one China" and has even flirted with ideas of national independence.

This stark contrast between the KMT and the DPP has infected the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue coalitions and their supporters. While there has remained a commitment towards alternate and peaceful transitions of power between the DPP and KMT, that has not spared either side from political contestation. The KMT criticizes the DPP on many grounds, the most outlandish of which is the claim that the assassination attempt in 2004 of former DPP President Chen Shui-bian was staged.⁵¹ The DPP has criticized the KMT on several issues as well, most notably regarding the party's political machinations with

⁴⁶ John Delury and Orville Schell, "Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century" Boston: Little, Brown Book Group, 2013. <http://bit.ly/3soulW>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rolf Barth and Jie Chen, "What did Sun Yat-Sen really die of? A re-assessment of his illness and the cause of his death" *Chinese Journal of Cancer*. Volume 35, Number 81, 2 September 2016. <http://bit.ly/3921V1d>.

⁴⁹ John Delury and Orville Schell, "Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century", Random House, 2013

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Shih Hsiu-Chuan, "KMT lawmakers want to reopen the 319 shooting case" *Taipei Times*, 20 March 2010. <http://bit.ly/3bWrsuR>.

Beijing.⁵² While the KMT and the Communist Party of China are historical enemies, they both share the “one China” concept. In spite of these deep tensions between the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue coalitions, they nevertheless cooperated in response to the Covid-19 pandemic thus distinguishing themselves from many other political actors in the world of democracies.

As noted above, the Taiwan CDC and CECC acted quickly to develop and implement Taiwan’s successful measures to control Covid-19. The Taiwan CDC and CECC are departments within the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW), a part of the Executive Yuan.⁵³ Therefore, the Executive Yuan played a crucial government role during the Covid-19 pandemic. The DPP did not politicize these agencies and appointed qualified and competent individuals from Taiwan’s medical community.⁵⁴ This had the effect of building confidence in these institutions with neither the KMT nor its supporters turning the Executive Yuan’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic into a contentious issue.⁵⁵ Yet this did not mean that the KMT allowed the DPP a blank page on its Covid-19 measures. The KMT continued in opposition role of questioning the government in the Legislative Yuan, in particular over the government role in managing the economy buffeted by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵⁶ The KMT was opposed to some parts of Taiwan’s Covid-19 stimulus bill but ultimately voted to pass the bill on February 25, 2021 after several discussion sessions.⁵⁷ Aside from that, the KMT did put aside its political differences to work with the DPP at the central and local levels of government on matters associated with Covid-19. This made it easier for the Executive Yuan and Legislative

⁵² Chen Kelvin, “DPP criticizes former Taiwan president, KMT chairman for not resisting China” *Taiwan Times*. 27 August 2020. <http://bit.ly/3s2yHqE>.

⁵³ Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare, “Organization.” *Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare*, 13 July 2020. <https://bit.ly/38RPwwW>.

⁵⁴ “Constitution”, *Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)*, *op cit*.

⁵⁵ Timothy Rich and Madelynn Einhorn, “What is the Public Perception of Taiwan’s Covid-19 Policies, Along With its Impact on Evaluations of President Tsai Ing-Wen?” *Taiwan Insight – University of Nottingham*. 27 January 2021. <https://bit.ly/3t0NqTg>.

⁵⁶ Sean Lin, “Virus Outbreak: KMT delays final review of COVID-19 act” *Taipei Times*, April 15, 2020. <https://taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/04/15/2003734653>

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

Yuan to amend its Covid-19 measures, including when dealing with new strains of Covid-19 emerging around the world.⁵⁸ As is to be expected, the temporary cooperation between the DPP and KMT coalitions may already be coming to an end. The KMT has taken issue with attempts by the DPP to leverage its successful management of the pandemic to achieve other political goals like the controversial beef and pork importation policy that would pave the way for a future trade deal with the United States.⁵⁹

Why did these contentious political foes cooperate in the face of the pandemic? The answer may lie in the threat to Taiwan from a previous SARS pandemic in 2003, which will be addressed in the following section. It is the likeliest explanation why, when the Covid-19 pandemic began, the political leaders of Taiwan briefly put away their disdain for each other. It is a testament to the Taiwanese political system's ability to work effectively during a time of crisis.

Geographical, historical, and cultural influences on Taiwan's Covid-19 response

Certainly, the surprisingly cooperative turn in the political system was an essential factor in Taiwan's success against Covid-19, but it was not the only factor. Taiwan had three additional factors that aided its Covid-19 measures: geography, history, and culture. A nation's geographic position grants it specific advantages and disadvantages. In public health emergencies, broadly speaking, nations with large land surfaces and many points of entry are much likelier to have difficulties containing the spread of a disease.⁶⁰ There have been many pandemics in the course of human history affecting the Eurasian, African, and American land masses.⁶¹ Among the most lethal was the Bubonic Plague, which killed an estimated 75-200 million people.⁶² In those days, naval ports were

⁵⁸ Nick Aspinwall, "Taiwan Tightens Pandemic Measures After First Local COVID-19 Case Since April" *The Diplomat*. 1 January 2021. <http://bit.ly/3lqESSU>.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Taiwan paves way for U.S. trade deal by easing pork, beef imports" *Reuters*. 28 August 2020. <http://reut.rs/2OMFYwe>.

⁶⁰ Sam Clifford, Edmunds, John. Jit, Mark. Kucharski, Adam. Russell, Timothy. Wu, Joseph. "Effect of internationally imported cases on internal spread of COVID-19: a mathematical modelling study" *Lancet Public Health*. Volume 6, Issue 1, 2021: p.12-20. <https://bit.ly/30PRIk6>.

⁶¹ MPH Online, "Outbreak: 10 of The Worst Pandemics in History" *MPH Online*. <http://bit.ly/38RKQqT>.

⁶² *Ibid*.

the centers of international commerce and thus central to urban life.⁶³ The disease that caused the Bubonic Plague, from the vector of which was fleas from rats, infected people through community spread radiating from ports.⁶⁴ The role played by ports in the past are now played by airports, bus depots, and train stations.⁶⁵ Dense urban living combined with ease of mobility contributes to the rapid spread.⁶⁶ It is little wonder why the nations of the world have once again been ravaged by a pandemic.⁶⁷ The United States, India, Brazil, Russia, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, Turkey, and Germany, the top ten in total cases and deaths, all have large land masses and many land-based entry points.⁶⁸

Geographically, the societies best equipped to combat the spread of Covid-19 are island nations, which have a better chance to control international points of entry. This is why many island nations have total case counts per capita far fewer than their continental neighbors.⁶⁹ There are exceptions to this rule of thumb. Despite being an island nation, the United Kingdom has experienced a severe impact from the Covid-19 pandemic because it was not able to take advantage of geography by being too slow to control incoming travelers.⁷⁰ Taiwan, however, has not become an exception to the rule.

As the British example demonstrates, geography is only an asset if government action is timely. Taiwan, along with a number of other island nations, even those with sizeable amounts of land, have been able to implement effective travel measures.⁷¹ Some of the more recognizable examples include Australia, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, and

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Sophie Bushwick, Lewis, Tanya. Montanez, Amanda. "Evaluating COVID Risk on Planes, Trains and Automobiles" *Scientific American*. 19 November 2020. <http://bit.ly/2P4hDlm>.

⁶⁶ Tanvi Misra, "Global Car, Motorcycle, and Bike Ownership, in 1 Infographic" *Bloomberg*. 17 April 2015. <http://bloom.bg/3vuNrAG>.

⁶⁷ Worldometer, "Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic" *Worldometer*, 17 March 2021. <https://bit.ly/2QgFoHH>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Stephen Grey, Macaskill, Andrew. Marshall, Andrew. McNeill, Ryan. Stecklow, Steve. Wilkes, Tommy. "50,000 COVID-19 deaths and rising. How Britain failed to stop the second wave" *Reuters*. 24 November 2020. <http://reut.rs/3bXzS5i>.

⁷¹ Parag Khanna and Spencer Wells, "Islands of Immunity." *Foreign Policy*. 17 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/3qXm8vs>.

Singapore.⁷² One disadvantage that Taiwan has in comparison with other island nations is its diplomatic isolation. Taiwan has been precluded from joining most international organizations, and has limited diplomatic relations, because of China's "One-China" Policy.⁷³ But, over the years, Taiwan has found ways to overcome this handicap, often able to achieve similar ends with less formal means. It was thus able to repatriate and quarantine most of the citizens who wished to return to the island. Taiwan was readily able to control its four international airports and 15 naval ports.⁷⁴ In summary, geography was crucial to Taiwan's success against Covid-19 because, as an island nation, Taiwanese health authorities leveraged its advantages.

What about historical factors? Have nations learned from previous experience of pandemics? Until around the time of the influenza pandemic of 1918, the germ theory of disease was not well understood.⁷⁵ But learning from the past, rulers could nevertheless attempt better public health policies using such measures as quarantine, isolation, and hygiene. Today, decision makers cannot claim ignorance or lack of knowhow. The DNA of the virus was known and distributed almost from the outset.⁷⁶ International organizations, regional bodies, and national centers have gained and distributed an abundance of knowledge to educate leaders and the global public about Covid-19.⁷⁷ That knowledge allowed for the speedy development of vaccines and quickly led to the first approved mRNA vaccine.⁷⁸

⁷² *Ibid*; Loh, Tim. "Who's Succeeding Against the Coronavirus and Why" *Bloomberg*. 25 September 2020. <http://bloom.bg/3eRbBzq>.

⁷³ BBC, "What is the 'One China' policy?", *op cit*.

⁷⁴ Bilaterals, "Negotiations: Taiwan." *Bilaterals*. May 2012. <http://bit.ly/2NqYqKg>; "International Airlines." *Taiwan: The Heart of Asia*. 17 February 2021. <https://bit.ly/2OFIyDY>; "Ports in Taiwan (15)" *Ports*. <http://bit.ly/3qY7OTe>.

⁷⁵ Michael Rosenwald, "History's deadliest pandemics, from ancient Rome to modern America." *The Washington Post*. 22 February 2021. <http://wapo.st/3cJbTpt>.

⁷⁶ Lisa Schnirring, "China releases genetic data on new coronavirus, now deadly", *The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy*, Jan 11, 2020, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/01/china-releases-genetic-data-new-coronavirus-now-deadly>

⁷⁷ Charity Warigon, "COVID-19 pandemic heightens the importance of handwashing with soap." *World Health Organization*. 23 October 2020. <http://bit.ly/3rZHutl>.

⁷⁸ Damian Garde and Jonathan Saltzman, "The story of mRNA: How a once-dismissed idea became a leading technology in the Covid vaccine race." *STAT*. 10 November 2020. <http://bit.ly/3lrX6DJ>.

In 2002-2004, Taiwan, along with most of East Asia, had to deal with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), a viral predecessor to Covid-19.⁷⁹ This challenge provided vital experience for political and public health leaders to deal with the new virus.⁸⁰ Taiwan reported its first case of SARS on March 14, 2003.⁸¹ The infected individual, a 54-year-old citizen of Taiwan, had contracted the disease while working in the Chinese province of Guangdong, the original epicenter of SARS.⁸² Although, unlike the first reported case of Covid-19, the first reported case of SARS was only discovered several weeks after the infected individual had returned to Taiwan.⁸³ The infected individual spread SARS in the community for 15 days before he was hospitalized and had an additional seven days to spread the disease in the hospital before he was properly diagnosed on March 14, 2003.⁸⁴ In the following days, numerous confirmed or possible cases of SARS were reported across Taiwan, with most investigations revealing a connection between infections and travel to mainland China.⁸⁵ The DPP leaders within the Executive Yuan moved to establish a SARS Emergency Response Task Force, which implemented many of the measures that were a precursor to their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, even after those measures were implemented, Taiwan continued to make some glaring blunders. For example, a laundry worker from Hoping Hospital had received multiple SARS tests which had each come back as false-negatives

⁷⁹ Donald McNeil Jr, "The Sars Epidemic: The Virus; Most Taiwan SARS Cases Spread by One Misdiagnosis" *NY Times*. 8 May 2003. <http://nyti.ms/3vBBg5f>.

⁸⁰ Wayne Soon, "From SARS to COVID-19: Rethinking Global Health Lessons from Taiwan" *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal*. Volume 14, Number 4, January 2021: p.647-655. <https://bit.ly/3eQbtAr>.

⁸¹ CDC. "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - Taiwan, 2003." CDC. 22 May 2003. <https://bit.ly/3cH8M1o>.

⁸² Shan-Chwen Chang, Chen, Chien-Jen. Chen, Kow-Tong. Chen, Tzay-Jinn. Chiang, I-Hsin. Dowell, Scott. Fisk, Tamara. Hsu, Kwo-Hsiung. Lee, Long-Teng. Olsen, Sonja. Twu, Shiing-Jer. Wu, Jiunn-Shyan. Wu, Yi-Chun, "Control Measures for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Taiwan" *US National Library of Medicine*. June 2003. <http://bit.ly/2NrM4BE>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Han Cheung, "Taiwan in Time: Remembering the SARS lockdown" *Taipei Times*. 19 April 2020. <http://bit.ly/3cMFgav>.

until finally testing positive on April 22, 2003.⁸⁷ The Taiwanese health authorities responded by locking down the hospital, placing many uninfected people's lives at risk.⁸⁸ While those health officials locked down hospitals, they did not explore the possibility of implementing a national lockdown.⁸⁹ In short, Taiwan's history in dealing with SARS was crucial in its success against Covid-19 because it created the foundation for an effective protocol to combat future pandemics.

Aside from geographical and historical factors, there can be no doubt that cultural factors are relevant. The cultural concept that may be most relevant is communitarianism, as contradistinctive to individualism in a culture of liberalism. Communitarian cultures emphasize the responsibility of individuals to their families and communities above themselves.⁹⁰ Liberal cultures promote the rights and liberties of individuals as preponderant.⁹¹ The majority of the nations have some combination of communitarian and liberal cultural values. But the different mix might make a significant difference when discussing effective Covid-19 measures.

It is reasonable to assume that liberal cultures have a harder time adapting to Covid-19 measures than communitarian cultures because those Covid-19 measures tend to restrict individual freedoms. The United States is an example of a nation that heavily favors its liberal culture, which may help explain why it has struggled to contain Covid-19.⁹² Federalism may also complicate an effective Covid-19 strategy. Many individuals in the United States considered it their right to choose whether or not to comply with government limitations on individual conduct.⁹³ The United Kingdom is another

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Daniel Bell, "Communitarianism" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 15 May 2020. <http://stanford.io/3sddACa>.

⁹¹ Shane Courtland. Gaus, Gerald. Schmidtz, David. "Liberalism" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 22 January 2018. <http://stanford.io/3vQ4ddW>.

⁹² Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, "Democracy under Lockdown" *Freedom House*. 2020. <http://bit.ly/3eLgcmS>.

⁹³ NASHIP. "Each State's COVID-19 Reopening and Reclosing Plans and Mask Requirements" *NASHIP*. 8 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/2OJoSPZ>.

example of a nation that leaned more on its liberal values during the spread of Covid-19.⁹⁴

On the other hand, nations that emphasize communitarian culture have an advantage adapting to Covid-19 measures because following those Covid-19 measures are seen as a part of an individual's responsibility towards their family and community. The island nation of Japan is an example of a nation that emphasizes its communitarian culture, which may explain its relative success during the spread of Covid-19.⁹⁵ Japan's central government never instituted a national lockdown.⁹⁶ Instead, the central government opted for a softer approach that involved closing-off some services in the public and private sectors.⁹⁷ Government officials were confident in those Covid-19 measures because they knew that their citizens, even with few actual legal restrictions limiting their freedoms, would generally comply. This is because no citizen would want to carry the guilt of spreading Covid-19 to their family and community.⁹⁸ Similarly, the Republic of Korea's central government never needed to authorize a national lockdown.⁹⁹ It shared a similar approach to Japan's but was quick to adjust the number of people allowed at social gatherings to accommodate their nation's Covid-19 case count.¹⁰⁰ The citizens of the Republic of Korea responded well to this government approach, much like their Japanese counterparts.¹⁰¹

Of course, there are exceptions in which nations that favor liberal values nevertheless succeeded in largely controlling the pandemic. Australia, traditionally

⁹⁴ Priya Tyagi, "The United Kingdom struggles against COVID-19" *Eastside Online*. 8 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/2OGWv4Q>.

⁹⁵ Suzuki Kazuto, "Japan's COVID-19 measures: Controlling the Spread Without Lockdowns" *Nippon*. 10 July 2020. <http://bit.ly/3rWPPHq>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Molly Walker, "How South Korea Avoided a COVID-19 Lockdown" *MEDPAGE TODAY*. 15 November 2020. <http://bit.ly/3loIAwq>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

valuing liberalism over communitarianism, has had relatively few Covid-19 cases.¹⁰² Brazil and India, often more associated with communitarian values, have had a surge of Covid-19 cases.¹⁰³ Clearly, culture alone is not destiny. Taiwanese people complied willingly with Covid-19 measures to prevent another version of the SARS outbreak. The public played a huge role in the success of Taiwan's Covid-19 measures.¹⁰⁴ As a result of learning from the SARS response, the public was sensitized to the need for compliance.¹⁰⁵ And while Taiwan is also developing its liberal values, its communitarian impulses carried the day. In conclusion, a combination of geographical, historical, and cultural factors is necessary for evaluating a nation's response to a pandemic. In Taiwan's case, its geography, history, and culture were beneficial factors that aided the construction of successful Covid-19 response.

Lessons learned

Just as Taiwan learned from SARS how to better handle Covid-19, so it needs to learn from the current episode. This section will cover what Taiwanese government officials have stated, what criticisms they have received, and any lessons that can be identified by either those government officials or their critics.

DPP government officials have not indicated that they could have improved on anything related to their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The President of the Executive Yuan, Tsai Ing-wen wrote an article in which she subtly boasted about Taiwan's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁶ She went on to reiterate her statements during her annual end-of-year address while emphasizing Taiwan's accomplishment

¹⁰² The Irish Times, "COVID-19: Australia 'victim of own success' as Germany faces months of tough restrictions" *The Irish Times*. 15 November 2020. <http://bit.ly/3eLi4vU>.

¹⁰³ Mihir Sharma, "Why Big Nations Have Been Brought Low by the Pandemic" *Bloomberg*. 30 July 2020. <http://bloom.bg/30Qfj4c>.

¹⁰⁴ Ming-Cheng Lo, Hsin-Yi, Hsieh. "The "Societalization" of pandemic unpreparedness: lessons from Taiwan's COVID response" *US National Library of Medicine*. 19 September 2020. <http://bit.ly/3lr2V44>.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Tsai Ing-Wen, "President of Taiwan: How My Country Prevented a Major Outbreak of COVID-19" *Time*. 16 April 2020. <http://bit.ly/3eNBgsU>.

despite its proximity to mainland China.¹⁰⁷ The former Vice-President of the Executive Yuan, Chen Chien-jen, who is himself an epidemiologist, has displayed a similar level of confidence, spending the majority of his time elaborating the reasons for Taiwan's success regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁸ Essentially, the biggest lesson that DPP government officials have learned is self-confidence in handling future pandemics.¹⁰⁹

KMT politicians initially cooperated with the DPP on Taiwan's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since that time, the KMT has largely tried to pivot the conversation away from the Covid-19 pandemic because of national popularity surrounding the DPP's handling of it.¹¹⁰ The one area on which the KMT has attempted to criticize the DPP is on its vaccination plan.¹¹¹ The KMT has argued that the DPP should be open to accepting vaccines made in China.¹¹² The DPP has countered by claiming that China is playing vaccine politics in favor of a future Pan-Blue administration.¹¹³ The underlying policy cleavage in Taiwan has spread to vaccines.¹¹⁴

Some critics pointed to a failure by the DPP to disseminate information on Covid-19 in languages other than Mandarin Chinese and sign language.¹¹⁵ Taiwan has 16 officially recognized indigenous groups, totaling 559,036 people.¹¹⁶ Although, this number does not account for another 400,000 people belonging to 10 indigenous groups not officially recognized.¹¹⁷ Together, those 956,036 people speak an estimated 42

¹⁰⁷ US News, "Tsai Credits Taiwan for Virus Wins, Notes China's Threats" *US News*. 1 January 2021.

<http://bit.ly/30RxDtV>.

¹⁰⁸ Jay Chen, "3 Factors Contribute to Taiwan's Success Against COVID-19: Former VP" *Business Wire*. 13 July 2020. <http://bwnews.pr/3bYBpHW>.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Rich, and Einhorn, *op cit.*

¹¹¹ Brain Hioe, "KMT Begins to Call for Tsai Administration to Accept Chinese Covid-19 Vaccines." *Taiwan Insight – University of Nottingham*. 25 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/3rXzIAj>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Robert Brook, Ng, Chun. Wang, C. "Response to COVID-19 in Taiwan" *JAMA Network*. 3 March 2020. <http://bit.ly/2QgXn0F>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ IWGIA, "Indigenous People's in Taiwan" *IWGIA*. <http://bit.ly/38QIVTv>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

indigenous languages, some of which are quickly disappearing due to lack of usage.¹¹⁸ Taiwan also has roughly 800,000 foreign nationals living in its borders, excluding Chinese nationals.¹¹⁹ Approximately 560,000 of those foreigners have migrated from Southeast Asia, with the remaining 240,000 foreigners originating from various parts of the world.¹²⁰ Collectively, those 800,000 people speak at least over 20 different languages, including all the most popular Asian and European languages.¹²¹ Finally, Taiwan has a handful of tourists that were stranded on the island because of Covid-19 pandemic.¹²² Those tourists, much like Taiwan's foreign residents, come from all over the world and were in great need of translation services to better understand Taiwan's Covid-19 measures.¹²³ Taiwan's Covid-19 strategy could have made life easier for nearly two million people by identifying additional languages for which to circulate its Covid-19 measures.

Other critics pointed to the DPP's slipup regarding the *Diamond Princess*.¹²⁴ The cruise ship *Diamond Princess* was quarantined in Japan after news broke that Covid-19 had spread among the passengers, ultimately resulting in 700 infections and 13 deaths.¹²⁵ Just before setting sail for Japan the *Diamond Princess* had made a scheduled stop at Taiwan's Keelung Port, where passengers had the opportunity to disembark and unwittingly spread Covid-19 to the local community.¹²⁶ The *Diamond Princess* was in Keelung 10 days after Taiwan's first case of Covid-19.¹²⁷ So, despite Taiwan's awareness

¹¹⁸ Ralph Jennings, "Taiwan Struggles to Save Indigenous Languages" *VOA NEWS*. 20 August 2012.

<http://bit.ly/3cMOwv6>.

¹¹⁹ Jøffe Olsson, "As China Becomes Less Attractive to Foreigners, Can Taiwan Win Them Over?" *Taiwan Sentinel*. 11 August 2017. <https://bit.ly/2PYeyUp>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ "2021.1 Foreign Residents by Nationality" *Ministry of the Interior National Immigration Agency Republic of China (Taiwan)*. 25 February 2021. <https://bit.ly/3txEbKe>.

¹²² Keoni Everington, "Taiwan grants 7th visa extension to foreigners stranded by Covid" *Taiwan Times*. 13 January 2021. <http://bit.ly/3lpuECp>.

¹²³ Keoni Everington, "Foreigners join 'Stuck in Taiwan - Best Place to Be' for help" *Taiwan Times*. 25 May 2020. <http://bit.ly/3lvkIXR>.

¹²⁴ Brook, Ng, Wang, *op cit.*

¹²⁵ France24, "A year after Diamond Princess, cruise industry eyes return" *France24*. 16 February 2021. <http://bit.ly/3tx6HvH>.

¹²⁶ Brook, Ng, Wang, *op cit.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

of Covid-19, a single mistake could have caused a surge in Covid-19 cases just before Taiwan's border closures were set to take place in February and March. Fortunately, there were no confirmed cases of Covid-19 reported following the *Diamond Princess*, but the fact remains that Taiwan could have avoided this possible source of infection by shutting down its borders once the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed.¹²⁸

The third area of criticism centered on how long the DPP would maintain its Covid-19 measures.¹²⁹ While Taiwanese citizens are willing to comply with their nation's Covid-19 measures, life must return to normal at some stage. The DPP attempted to ease some Covid-19 measures, such as border controls, which proved challenging because of an imported case of the UK Covid-19 variant on December 30, 2020.¹³⁰ Then, despite the DPP tightening Covid-19 measures in response to the UK Covid-19 variant, Taiwan received imported cases of the Brazil and South African Covid-19 variants in the subsequent months.¹³¹ Those Covid-19 variants have proven to be much more infectious and dangerous to their victims.¹³² As of March 2021, the most recognizable Covid-19 variants originate from Brazil, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States.¹³³ Yet, Taiwanese government officials have continued allowing flights from those nations for work-related reasons. There is evidence to suggest that Covid-19 is mutating at an alarming pace.¹³⁴ Even with a quarantine system in place, the possibility exists of a Taiwanese citizen catching a Covid-19 variant from a high-risk foreigner. So, the question of how long the DPP can maintain its COVID-19 measures remains relevant. Clearly, the Taiwanese government would like to get back to normality as quickly as possible with

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Chiang Yi-Ching, "Taiwan confirms first case of COVID-19 patient with U.K. variant" *Focus Taiwan*. 30 December 2020. <http://bit.ly/3qR7tSw>.

¹³¹ Reuters, "Taiwan confirms three cases of Brazil COVID-19 variant." *Reuters*. 21 February 2021. <http://reut.rs/3ePSZjm>; Taiwan confirms first case of S. African COVID-19 variant." *Reuters*. 13 January 2021. <http://reut.rs/2OZigwG>.

¹³² Amir Khan, "How dangerous are the new COVID variants?" *Aljazeera*. 14 March 2021. <http://bit.ly/3bT6c9b>.

¹³³ Mercey Livingston, "Coronavirus variants: What you need to know." *CNET*. 15 March 2021. <http://cnet.co/3eRr3LS>.

¹³⁴ Khan, *op cit.*

the risk of that is that another *Diamond Princess* incident, could erase all the hard work that Taiwan's government officials and citizens have worked together to achieve.

Although Taiwanese government officials have shown their willingness to address their mistakes throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, their process has slowed. The reputational gains from the successful management of the pandemic in Taiwan therefore remains at risk.

Conclusions: government competence is the key

Taiwan has proven that democracies can implement successful Covid-19 measures to mitigate the ramifications of this public health crisis. Taiwan's success against a public health crisis was not hindered by its democratic form of government. Taiwan experienced a precursor to the Covid-19 pandemic: the breakout of SARS in Taiwan in 2003. Government officials used that experience to craft effective public health policies. Then, when the Covid-19 pandemic began, they quickly implemented public health measures, not only drawing from that experience but also capitalizing on a range of geographic and cultural factors. And, for the better part of a year, Taiwan's political parties, despite their animosity towards one another, worked together at the central and local levels of government to uphold those Covid-19 measures. Taiwan's overall Covid-19 success has not been without problems. Taiwan could have increased awareness for its Covid-19 strategy among the entire population by translating documents into various languages. Taiwan also could have implemented its Covid-19 measures, specifically travel restrictions, on the same day as its first case of Covid-19 to avoid the *Diamond Princess* threat. Nevertheless, the Taiwanese government officials have shown a willingness to learn from their mistakes. Therefore, as the Covid-19 pandemic continues, they are likely to develop creative solutions to satisfy both their domestic and foreign objectives.

So, does the Taiwan case prove that democracy is the best form of government for addressing public health crises? Taiwan has joined many countries in implementing

effective Covid-19 measures. Yet, not all of them are democracies. There are plenty of countries with authoritarian governments which have also succeeded in implementing effective measures. For example, authoritarian regimes like China, where Covid-19 originated, and Vietnam are both being recognized for their long-term strategies against Covid-19.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, democracies like the United States and the United Kingdom are being recognized for failing spectacularly in this regard.¹³⁶ It is not about whether a country is a democracy or an autocracy, but rather if there is a competent government in power managing the public health crisis. A competent government can deal with any unique factors in their country. In Taiwan's case, the government had a group of leaders who were able to do just that, and who rose to the occasion when the Taiwanese people needed them at their best. Taiwan's democracy did not preclude having a competent government.

¹³⁵ Rachel Kleinfeld, "Do Authoritarian or Democratic Countries Handle Pandemics Better?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 31 March 2020. <http://bit.ly/3txrsr3>.

¹³⁶ Worldometer, *op cit*.

Chapter 9

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ELECTIONS IN UGANDA

Susan Ombwayo

The spread of Covid-19 around the globe has resulted in catastrophic consequences for the global economic, social, political, and other sectors. Most developed and developing countries faced a decline in economic activities and political stability due to growing infection and the number of deaths. The effect of Covid-19 was even more pronounced in developing countries that have fewer governmental resources on which to draw. In the Global South, Covid-19 posed many challenges to bring life back to normal. This paper will highlight the impact of Covid-19 on the political system of Uganda and the electoral campaigns of 2021. In addition, the political approach towards the pandemic and the lessons learned from it will be discussed.

The Government of Uganda takes charge

Right from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government of Uganda took strict measures to curtail the spread of infection among its people. The approach of President Yoweri Museveni was quite proactive in this regard by imposing strict lockdown measures and making people wear face masks in public places.¹ Even before the first case of Covid-19 was registered in Uganda, the government held a health awareness campaign and initiated actions that would considerably slow down the spread of infections.² However, various political parties have used aspects of the pandemic to

¹ Innocent Anguyo, "Unmasking Political COVID-19 Face Coverings in Uganda," *Africa at LSE*, 2020.

² *Ibid*, 2.

promote their political agendas. Political actors instrumentalized face masks to promote the colors and symbols of different parties to strengthen their objectives ahead of the electoral campaign. The face mask, which is intended to reduce the spread of the infection, is thus used as a marketing strategy as well for political parties to gain an edge during elections. The controversial question to be asked is whether this is a dangerous politicizing of public health or a valid form of expression in such an intense state of the pandemic.

The use of face masks was a compensatory measure by the political parties due to the restriction of public gatherings and political rallies to promote their candidates.³ The previous custom of having large rallies and social gatherings by political parties could not be practiced this time.⁴ Accordingly, candidates could only reach potential voters by the virtual means of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) because President Museveni had complete control over the traditional mass media channels. Due to restrictions on social gatherings, political parties could not spread their message to the public in a conventional manner. Moreover, since the proportion of the Ugandan people that utilize social media is low, promoting messages through face masks was seen as an effective way of reaching the masses.

Another contentious political issue amidst Covid-19 is the unawareness of people about different political systems and models. The people who do not favor the existing President and the political system he engineered, may not know of alternative systems. President Museveni effectively used this familiarity to boost his image in the eyes of the public. The strategic planning and proactive measures adopted by the president helped control the spread of the coronavirus and gave him a head-start over the opposition. The institutional symbolization in the form of promotion of wearing face masks and using symbols to spread the awareness messages in the light of political interests, were strategic

³ Hassan Isilow, "COVID-19 Casts Shadow on Uganda's Election Campaigns," *aa.com*, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/covid-19-casts-shadow-on-uganda-s-election-campaigns/2042257>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

measures adopted particularly by the strong parties. Since the incumbent president has control of all traditional mass media outlets, he already has a distinct advantage. The Covid-19 crisis has significantly shaped the political landscape around the globe, including democracy and the electoral process in Africa, with important implications for the rule of law, security, and civil society.⁵ Many countries delayed their electoral campaigns and elections to manage the consequences of the pandemic. Uganda is among those 11 African countries that had to delay their scheduled election process due to Covid-19.⁶ Delaying elections is a contentious political decision, whether in Africa or elsewhere. A pandemic is the sort of emergency that can justify such a step.⁷ Nevertheless, there are various examples of elections being conducted successfully despite the risky health situation in the country because the necessary measures were taken to control the spread of the pandemic.

Should African countries, like Uganda, with scarce facilities and resources to manage the Covid-19 outbreak, conduct elections during this time? Is the risk too great? The research suggests that the pandemic affected the electoral process in Africa, not only in terms of democracy and society, but it also threatened cooperation between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU). Moreover, another problem associated with holding elections as scheduled in Africa is the lack of infrastructure and facilities to make voters cast their choice by mail or through remote electronic means. Postponing the elections for countries like Uganda was probably a wise decision, considering the strength of democracy can be measured by voter turnout and this can only be maximized if it is possible to vote in a safe and reliable manner, without compromising public health.⁸ Moreover, social media is largely unregulated and can be the source of fake news.⁹ The Museveni government is sensitive to low voter turnout and protests thus challenging its

⁵ H la Slim, "Electoral Process in Africa: The Impact of COVID-19 and Challenges for the EU," *European View* 19, no. 2 (2020): 212-21.

⁶ *Ibid*, 212.

⁷ Anthony Banbury, "Opinion: Elections and COVID-19-What We Learned from Ebola," *Devex. Org* 8 (2020).

⁸ Slim, *op cit.*, 212.

⁹ *Ibid*, 212.

legitimacy.¹⁰ Further, the government would be hard pressed to manage the pandemic while dealing with civil unrest. Therefore, the strategic measure to delay the election until the pandemic is under control was justified.

Government approach towards Covid-19

The Ugandan government's response to Covid-19 was to mitigate the challenges associated with the health crisis. Social and political challenges were numerous as lockdown led to unemployment for many who used to earn money on a daily basis by running small businesses. The economic hardships put around 40 million Africans into extreme poverty.¹¹ African countries need to work together to revive the social and economic life of its people.

The policymakers in different African countries, including Uganda, cannot avoid a focus on helping the business continuity to respond effectively to the new conditions. In strategizing the normalization prospects, businesses that can continue to create value and can continue to deliver services during the pandemic despite the lockdown, should be prioritized. The Ugandan government's mode of action was to prioritize the accessibility of healthcare facilities to the public and also ensure that the economic instability and unemployment was minimized. The industries that have high economic potential and offer a competitive advantage, should be prioritized to bring the market conditions back to the normal.¹²

A key element of the Covid-19 response is an emphasis on healthcare as it pertains to all essential services and facilities accessible to the public. To ensure the proper functioning of different sectors including healthcare, a coordination committee was formed by the Director of Clinical Services. The committee published guidelines for continuity of essential services during the Covid-19 outbreak to support law enforcement

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 212.

¹¹ Acha Leke, *Emerging Stronger: How Africa's Policymakers Can Bolster Their Economies during and beyond the COVID-19 Crisis* (Foresight Africa, 2020).

¹² *Ibid*.

agencies, medical facilities, and other essential organizations.¹³ These guidelines provide a series of interventions depending on the extent of the spread of the pandemic in different regions of Uganda. The successes and challenges associated with the implementation of the guidelines need to be considered before it can be used as a standard for future healthcare provision.

The sudden increase in the price of food and goods due to the pandemic resulted in an increase in the poverty level. The urban poor could not afford to buy their normal living items, and the proportion of people in extreme poverty started to increase.¹⁴ The situation in the rural areas was not much better. The effect was pronounced for the people living along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The border is normally open for routine business.¹⁵ However, due to the pandemic situation, many people on either side of the border are unable to reach their farms or trade their produce. The challenges faced by the Ugandan government were many.

It is worth mentioning that the centralized management of the Covid-19 by the Ugandan government was shaped by the previous experience of managing the Ebola virus.¹⁶ During the early phase of the virus, the measures of strict lockdown for a limited period proved to be quite effective in mitigating the initial wave of infections. However, as time passed, the risk to the economy has to be considered because lockdown is not a feasible solution for most poor countries of Africa. As opposed to a lockdown that would lead to a decline in the economy, protocols such as social distancing and face masks need to be emphasized to limit the spread of the virus while allowing businesses to continue to run. Additionally, on the operational level, the government released a set of documents to guide the prevention and containment efforts for the Covid-19.¹⁷ The actions taken by

¹³ ThinkWell, "Uganda's Emergency Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study," 2020, www.thinkwell.global.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Daniel Geiger, Lisa Harborth, and Alex Mugyisha, "Managing Enduring Public Health Emergencies Such as COVID-19: Lessons from Uganda Red Cross Society's Ebola Virus Disease Response Operation," *BMJ Leader*, 2020.

¹⁷ ThinkWell, *op cit.*

the government comprised broad-level intervention measures that were contextualized and harmonized according to the prevailing conditions of different regions. The strategic planning of the Ugandan government put an emphasis on business continuity.

The Ugandan government relied on the private sector to support and cement the role of the public services.¹⁸ Logistical support and other transport could be managed by the private sector to deliver essential services.¹⁹ Gaps could be filled by contracting different services to third-party providers. As time went on and as the spread of the Covid-19 was minimized, the Ugandan government was able to focus on finding ways that enabled businesses to resume their normal operations. The government of Uganda worked to strengthen cross-boundary coordination to improve the living conditions of those who are poor and unable to trade across the borders. Management of the healthcare services was the main of the Covid-19 response action plan. The impact of Covid-19 involved short-term and long-term effects which required adaptive planning and strategic direction to manage resources as well as finances to lead mitigating actions.²⁰

The case of Uganda is interesting because policymakers were relatively experienced in dealing with other outbreaks such as the Ebola virus. However, this experience did not prevent the worsening food security problem. The Ugandan government nevertheless continued to follow strict regulations regarding testing, quarantining, tracing, and treating cases according to the severity of the disease.²¹ A study on Kenya and Uganda showed that food deprivation increased by 38% and 44% respectively due to economic decline and rising prices.²² Most people prioritized their efforts to find food and other daily commodities rather than focusing on measures to protect health. Furthermore, the study revealed that the participation of people and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ UNDP-Uganda, "Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Uganda," *UNDP*, 2020.

²¹ UN NEWS, "At UN, Uganda Highlights COVID-19 Response, Commitment to Sustainable Development," *news.un.org*, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1074272>.

²² Monica K Kansime et al., "COVID-19 Implications on Household Income and Food Security in Kenya and Uganda: Findings from a Rapid Assessment," *World Development* 137 (2020): 105199.:1-3

groups in social security schemes at the national did not meet expectations.²³ Nevertheless, membership in government assistance programs helped reduce the impact of the income shock during the Covid-19 period.²⁴

Response of the medical community

The response of the medical community in dealing with Covid-19 in Uganda is central strong partnerships, and US CDC investments some years earlier during the Ebola scourge proved to be instrumental in the response to Covid-19.²⁵ Due to the public health crisis, interventions were required by the health communities at various levels including public and private aspects of the health sector. Moreover, the global health community led by the World Health Organization (WHO) played a key role in assessing the situation and providing advice on how to manage the Covid-19 outbreak.²⁶ Due to the global impact of the pandemic, shortages of masks, testing kits, and other resources had to be managed. The guidelines by WHO covered various routine scenarios at home and work, to ensure safety when dealing with a public health crisis. The CDC organization contributed technical input to the healthcare centers to strengthen the primary intervention measures.²⁷

Initially, the prompt response by the Ugandan government and healthcare facilities helped mitigate the impact of Covid-19.²⁸ However, like most countries, the healthcare burden on the hospitals, hardly well-funded or state-of-the-art, was still overwhelming.²⁹ Furthermore, due to increased inpatient admissions in hospitals, the health risks increased and required most facilities to be restricted to essential and emergency operations only. Needless to say, overall healthcare costs increased, a further

²³ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²⁵ CDC, "Strong Partnerships and CDC Investments Support Uganda's Rapid Response to COVID-19," *Centers for Disease Control*, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/stories/uganda-rapid-response-to-covid-19.html>.

²⁶ Kansiime et al, *op cit.*, 7-8.

²⁷ CDC, *op cit.*

²⁸ Kansiime et al, *op cit.*, 7-8.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 7-8.

blow to those experiencing poverty and extreme poverty. Uganda's primary healthcare comprises decentralized district healthcare systems. The district-based healthcare systems contain different levels of health facilities, with each level offering a range of services. The healthcare systems are linked with the community through the Village Health Teams (VHTs) and the Community Health Workers (CHWs). This model and hierarchy worked quite well in implementing the Covid-19 response within the country to minimize the burden of the disease. More than 80% of the Ugandan population has some form of health service available within 5km of their home.³⁰

Strengthening the healthcare services and facilities was a goal of Ugandan senior medical officers to go beyond providing intensive care in hospitals, but also to support preventative measures. Beds and ventilators in primary care hospitals are limited and are insufficient for all seriously ill patients. Further, most of the public do not have access to the ambulatory services that could prevent hospital admission.³¹ Sensitization of the public regarding spread of the virus and preventive measures is the key step in reducing the infection rate. National level health education in Uganda targeted mass education about maintaining proper hygiene including handwashing.³² President Museveni's role was crucial in directly communicating the preventive measures to the public. He encouraged prevention of mass gatherings during weddings and funerals.³³ The directives of President Museveni were disseminated through different mass media channels, including at the district and community levels. The district and community leaders were involved in primary healthcare by ensuring that the standard operating procedures were implemented at public places, schools, and offices.

The management of Covid-19 cases was the second phase of the primary healthcare response. The patients who tested positive were immediately admitted to

³⁰ Innocent K Besigye, Michael Mulwooza, and Jane Namatovu, "Coronavirus Disease-2019 Epidemic Response in Uganda: The Need to Strengthen and Engage Primary Healthcare," *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine* 12, no. 1 (2020): 1-3

³¹ *Ibid*, 2-3.

³² *Ibid*, 2-3.

³³ *Ibid*, 2-3.

hospitals as per WHO recommendations. The patients mostly had mild to medium symptoms. Home-based care could not generally be practiced because isolating at home was often impossible and might have resulted in infecting family members.

There were innovations in Uganda. Academics at Makerere University designed a low-cost ventilator to support serious Covid-19 patients.³⁴ The government was proactive in providing fortified milk to pregnant women during the lockdown period.³⁵ Community level healthcare actions were undertaken by civil society organizations, religious groups, and the businesses.³⁶ However, problems regarding management of Covid-19 in the healthcare sector emerged. There were coordination problems at the community level. Healthcare workers could not easily move around to different cities and help those in need given Uganda's inadequate transportation system. The existing screening and testing technology was ineffective. The United Nations setup a project in Uganda with a local company, Safeboda, to promote online tools that are used commonly in developed countries.³⁷ Various banking, food delivery, taxi, and other online services were launched to support the revival of activities in a safe manner.³⁸

Response to the pandemic to achieve political goals

Ahead of the elections in 2021, Uganda's government employed its healthcare campaign to support its political prospects. The government was aware that face masks could be used as marketing strategy, so it distributed over 35 million masks as part of the state-sponsored relief efforts. In some regions, the government took actions to disallow masks that had some connection with opposition political parties.³⁹ This was because colors represented political affiliation. For example, yellow symbolized the ruling

³⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁷ UN NEWS, "Uganda Looks Online for Answers to COVID Economic Crisis," news.un.org, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070102>.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ Anguyo, *op cit*.

National Resistance Movement (NRM), blue was the color for Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), and red was associated with another political party⁴⁰.

The government decided that masks distributed by the government would contain non-partisan colors.⁴¹ The aim behind imposing such restrictions was to curtail the influence of opposition parties. President Museveni belonging to the ruling party has dominated the political landscape in Uganda for nearly four decades, so he was less in need for symbols of support. President Yoweri Museveni made more than 16 live speeches by the end of June 2020. During the initial phase of the Covid-19, the role of the President was similar to a grandfather for his nation as he used to televise addresses for hours.⁴² It was clear that fighting the pandemic was seen by the President as a political and strategic measure to consolidate his position in the upcoming elections. This led some to criticize the activities of the President as part of a process to build his political capital.⁴³ Longtime presidential candidate Kizza Besigye and opposition MP Ibrahim Semujju Nganda accused Museveni of using his official powers for his political advantage.⁴⁴ The President certainly made himself more visible in 2020, which was a crucial period for selling the overall government policies. Others believed government actions were justified. Whether intended as a partisan tactic or not, measures such as giving food to poor and investing money in public relief efforts, resulted in strengthening the image of the President in the minds of many people.

The relief measures in the form of giving food, clothes, masks, and other commodities to the poor people were executed by the governmental task force and not by political parties.⁴⁵ But the impact of this seemingly non-partisan process was to accomplish the political objectives of the incumbent government. Even so, the elections

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Samuel Kasirye, "The Political Implications of COVID-19 in Uganda," *rosalux.de*, 2020, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/42397/the-political-implications-of-covid-19-in-uganda?cHash=f445c087738f385f9e4ce016a608dbbb>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of January 2021 proved to be quite competitive despite these and other such efforts of the Museveni government.⁴⁶

Mr. Bobi Wine, a rapper-turned-lawmaker, was effective in challenging the Museveni campaign.⁴⁷ Wine was elected to parliament in 2017 and his main target was the youth vote. During his campaign, he was arrested several times and also charged in court for violating the Covid-19 protocols by staging political rallies. The United Nations stepped in to try to allow Wine to campaign.⁴⁸ The growing use of force by security personnel, and violence associated with elections was monitored by the United Nations.⁴⁹ The UN human rights office urged the Ugandan government to hold peaceful elections and allow the opposition to take part in campaigning.⁵⁰ Bobi Wine ran a successful political campaign but failed to unseat Museveni.⁵¹ He was arrested shortly before the vote and the court stopped all activities around his residence during the election period. Wine, however, remains optimistic because of his image in the eyes of the nation, particularly the youth.⁵²

The lessons of Ebola

The surveillance model in Uganda established during the Ebola virus period was utilized to manage Covid-19. The testing and tracing apparatus also proved to be fairly effective in terms of limiting the spread of the disease to different clusters. As more sub-Saharan countries implement the measures of social distancing to manage the pandemic, intervention measures could be adopted and implemented based on the experiences

⁴⁶ Abdi Latif Dahir, "Ugandans Voted Today. Will Their President of 35 Years Win Again?," The New York Times, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/14/world/africa/uganda-elections-bobi-wine-museveni.html>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ UN NEWS, "End Arrests of Political Opponents in Uganda: UN Independent Experts," news.un.org, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1081072>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ UN NEWS, "Uganda: 'Deteriorating' Human Rights Situation in Run-up to Elections next Week," news.un.org, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1081662>.

⁵¹ BBC NEWS, "Bobi Wine: Uganda's 'Ghetto President,'" BBC News, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55572903>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

gained from the Ebola virus. Africa has dealt with various bouts of the Ebola virus in the past decade, including establishing effective management and decision-making frameworks.⁵³ The presence of the decision-making matrix provides for essential services and facilities to the public.⁵⁴

The Covid-19 pandemic started at a time when the second most prolonged Ebola virus was declared to have ended.⁵⁵ Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda were in a better position to face the next pandemic. The Ugandan government ramped up testing and took steps to better control movement across international borders.⁵⁶ As per WHO guidelines, many African countries closed their borders to prevent Covid-19 spreading. Uganda's response to the pandemic affected multiple stakeholders. Vulnerable populations such as pregnant women had increased risks due to the restricted "non-emergency" movement. Some measures were proposed by the National Health Consumers' Organization and its partners as follows:

- Promote community trust and ownership of actions for better Covid-19 response
- Use media as a tool for amplifying voice and accountability
- Provide transparency regarding the utilization of government resources

Lessons learned

The decline in the economy led to severe consequences for the public due to the rise in food prices, homelessness, transportation restrictions, and subpar healthcare facilities. The government learned to apply a risk management framework that keeps the economy going despite the pandemic. The economically vulnerable sectors of the markets including essential services were not in favor of a complete lockdown. The supply chains of retailers were disturbed. The government did its best to maintain

⁵³ Ivan Lumu, "COVID-19 Response in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from Uganda," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 14, no. 3 (2020): p.46-48.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Robinah Kaitiritimba, "An Effective Response to COVID-19 Is an Inclusive Response: The Case of Uganda," UHC2030, 2020, <https://www.uhc2030.org/blog-news-events/uhc2030-blog/an-effective-response-to-covid-19-is-an-inclusive-response-the-case-of-uganda-555370/> .

business continuity by taking a step-by-step approach. Primary healthcare workers were at the forefront of this crisis and were themselves vulnerable to a higher infection rate. Accordingly, attention had to be paid to securing protective equipment for these workers.

President Museveni's strategy throughout 2020 was to control the virus and gain a political advantage at the same time. The president used his position to address Ugandans to assure them the pandemic was under control. Some opposition parties argued that Museveni was using his Covid-19 measures as a means of gaining a political advantage. Museveni's presidential campaign spread awareness about the virus through different mass media channels. This approach was also criticized by the opposition parties due to lack of non-partisan involvement. The Ugandan government limitations on social gatherings was beneficial to the incumbent party. The rallies of the opposition parties were banned due to such strict regulations. The UN raised concerns over the growing cases of violence and tensions in different parts of the country during the election campaign.⁵⁷ Museveni faced ten candidates and the campaign was quite fierce despite the advantages enjoyed by the incumbent.⁵⁸

The opposition parties had no choice but to accept the policies of the government and operate in the margins available to them. The political parties initially used face masks to spread their messages, but the government banned these and approved only those masks that didn't carry any political symbol. An important lesson learnt was the need to prioritize resources for primary healthcare facilities to reduce the impact of the disease to the population. Primary healthcare focused on prevention rather than hospitalization. Healthcare workers identified and assisted those most vulnerable to the virus.

This chapter highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on politics and the electoral campaign. The emergence of the virus was a contentious issue for Uganda's president

⁵⁷ UN NEWS, "Uganda: UN Chief Calls for 'Inclusive, Transparent and Peaceful' Elections," *News.Un.Org*, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1082012>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

during the elections. The government did not let this political opportunity go to waste, but instead, implemented strategic measures to control the infection rate and enhance its standing. The approach of the government was similar to others in deciding to minimize social gatherings and promote wearing face masks. As the events unfolded, Uganda's government kept adapting its strategies to support businesses and essential services that were affected by the lockdown. The response of the medical community was central to the overall context of governmental intervention. The political aims of the government were embedded in promoting healthcare and thus win the trust of the electorate. Sharing responsibilities with civil society organizations also assisted in this regard.

President Museveni has been in office for almost four decades and the pandemic provided him both challenges and opportunities to retain his position. His appearance at numerous public gatherings showed that the government was sharply focused on managing Covid-19 thus gaining a political advantage. The autocratic tendencies of the Museveni administration were evident in the implementation of strict administrative and regulatory measures. While Museveni gave food to the poor, he also had his political rival arrested. Adoption of an autocratic style of the leadership was effective for the incumbent in Uganda during the pandemic. But it will leave Uganda with a septuagenarian president whose term in office will now extend beyond 40 years.

Chapter 10

**THE UNITED KINGDOM:
COVID-19 AND THE DECAY OF DEMOCRACY**

Arsanious Hanna

The United Kingdom Government Asserts Powers

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about drastic change to the world's political and social landscape, giving governing institutions unilateral capacity to expand and thus intrude on the rights of the people. Such expansion of the roles of governing bodies and the subversion of civil liberties threatens the principles of modern democracies. In times of catastrophe and disaster, governments exploit people's fear, allowing them to pass aggressive expansionist policies and legislation in the name of public welfare and public safety. In the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the United States government passed the Patriot Act (2001), granting federal intelligence agencies vast surveillance authority, undermining the search and seizure provision of the 4th Amendment and the due process clause of the 5th and 14th Amendments.¹ Similarly, following the Port Arthur Massacre in Tasmania on April 29, 1996, Australian states and territories adopted the 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA), implemented gun buybacks, and established strict gun law provisions limiting the rights of Australian citizens to own guns.² As noted in a 2012 faculty publication, "many of the most grave and systematic human rights abuses occur

¹ Dara Lind, "Everyone's heard of the Patriot Act. Here's what it actually does," *Vox*, June 2, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/6/2/8701499/patriot-act-explain>

² Library of Congress, "Firearms-Control Legislation and Policy: Australia," *Library of Congress*, [Last Updated] December 30, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/firearms-control/australia.php>

during public emergencies, when states employ extraordinary powers to address threats to the public.”³ The tragedy followed by government expansion paradigm allowing governments to respond to crises by undermining civil liberties, is not a new phenomenon. Unfortunately, this paradigm has become more prevalent in recent months, notably within the United Kingdom (U.K.) in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the U.K. passed strict laws and regulations limiting people’s ability to perform basic day-to-day functions and depriving many others of what they believed were their due process rights. On February 10, 2020, just ten days after the first known cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in England, the Secretary of State invoked the Public Health Control of Disease Act (1984), proposing the Health Protection Coronavirus Regulations (2020) legislation.⁴ The regulations outlined in the legislation established radical detention, isolation, and enforcement measures against people expected of carrying Covid-19 and imposed criminal liability on persons who attempted to evade or refused to comply with the newly passed strict standards for self-isolation or quarantine. This paper seeks to explore and analyze the rise of government expansion into the lives of British citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, while proposing measures to be adopted by the U.K. to prevent government overreach in times of crisis.

Pre-Covid Subversion of Democracy

The disposition of the executive arm of the U.K. government to dispense with democratic norms was clear in the months leading up to the pandemic. On August 28, 2019—at the height of the Brexit crisis—Prime Minister (PM) Boris Johnson moved to

³ Evan J. Criddle and Evan Fox-Decent, "Human Rights, Emergencies, and the Rule of Law," *College of William & Mary Law School Faculty Publications* 34, no.1531 (2012): 46.

<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2572&context=facpubs>

⁴ Daniel Kraemer, "Coronavirus: What's in the emergency legislation?" *BBC News*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52004116>

obtain Queen Elizabeth II's approval to prorogue parliament.⁵ Prorogation is a tool invoked by a PM, with the Queen's approval which is a formality, to suspend a scheduled session of parliament for a certain period of time. Over the last 40 years, edicts of prorogation invoked by the PM have generally lasted around a week. Johnson proposed the suspension of parliament to be two weeks immediately followed by a scheduled three-week recess for a total of five consecutive weeks. Speaking on behalf of critics in both parliament and the U.K., The Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow said, "it is blindingly obvious that the purpose of prorogation now would be to stop Parliament debating Brexit and performing its duty in shaping a course for the country."⁶ A month after Johnson had obtained the Queen's approval, the U.K.'s Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, ruled that the prorogation "was unlawful, void and of no effect." Delivering the judgement of the court, Brenda Hale, the President of the Supreme Court of the U.K., condemned Johnson's prorogation not only as unlawful but as a threat to the U.K.'s fundamental principles of democracy, while "Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour Party, said that Johnson was guilty of a 'contempt for democracy and an abuse of power.'"⁷ Although Johnson's attempt to suspend parliament predates the advent of Covid-19 in the U.K., his actions point to the decay of democratic principles and values, illustrates the early assertions of increased power by the executive government in disregard for democracy, and foreshadows the abuses of government that would occur during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Elections and Public Emergencies

During the deliberation of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., then-President Lyndon B.

⁵ Amanda Sloat, "Brexit Endgame: Boris Johnson suspends Parliament," *Brookings Institution*, August 29, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/08/29/brexit-endgame-boris-johnson-suspends-parliament/>

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Max Burman and Alexander Smith, "U.K. Supreme Court rules Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Parliament suspension unlawful," *NBC News*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/brexit-referendum/u-k-supreme-court-rules-prime-minister-boris-johnson-s-n1057251>

Johnson issued the profound statement that “a man without a vote is a man without protection.”⁸ The principles and values of a free and open democratic society across the globe rest upon the right of the people to vote. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) serves as a precursor to President Lyndon B. Johnson’s statement, reinforcing the importance of elections. Article 21(3) of the UDHR states, “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”⁹ In its wisdom, the international community understood the fundamental importance of periodic voting and elections. When government institutions and officials – irrespective of whether they are elected, unelected, or appointed – suspend or delay voting and elections for an unreasonable period of time, then the citizenry loses a certain protection from government intrusion. This is the case in the U.K. and many countries around the world with the Covid-19 election postponement dilemma.

The first wave of recommendations suggesting the postponement or cancellation of elections in the U.K. came on March 11, 2020, when the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) requested that the government postpone the upcoming May 7, 2020 elections to prevent a Covid outbreak.¹⁰ The May 7, 2020 election would have included “118 English councils and mayors in London, Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Tees Valley.”¹¹ The following day on March 12, 2020, the U.K.’s Electoral Commission (EC) followed the AEA’s recommendation and suggested that the May 7, 2020 elections be postponed until fall 2020, citing fears of triggering greater

⁸ Wayne Kroger, “A man without a vote is a man without protection,” *The Intelligencer*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.theintell.com/article/20150720/opinion/307209788>

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *United Nations* (1948). <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

¹⁰ Lizzy Buchan, “Coronavirus: Elections chiefs urge government to consider ‘legal basis’ for postponing local elections,” *Independent*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-news-local-elections-postpone-legal-aea-a9394906.html>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

community transmission of Covid-19.¹² On March 13, 2020, Johnson, in evaluating the recommendations from both the EC and AEA, postponed all scheduled local elections for a period of one-year, which was legislated into the *Coronavirus Act 2020*, enacted on March 25, 2020. According to the BBC, “the PM's move is the most significant delay to polling since then-prime minister Tony Blair suspended the local and general elections in 2001 over the foot and mouth outbreak.”¹³ The U.K. is not alone in its radical postponement of elections. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, “at least 76 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone national and subnational elections...and at least 108 countries and territories have decided to hold national or subnational elections despite concerns related to Covid-19.”¹⁴

Balancing Elections and Public Health

While the international community has affirmed its dedication to free, open, and periodic elections and voting processes – as indicated by the UDHR – the international community is also aware that in the event of exigent circumstances which threaten life or limb, nation states must respond with extreme measures to prevent such injury or loss. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides a framework that balances public emergencies with the right to vote and the state’s obligation to hold periodic elections. Under Article 25(b) of the ICCPR, member states must provide every citizen the right and opportunity “to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.”¹⁵ While the

¹² Conrad Duncan, “Coronavirus: Electoral Commission recommends May local elections should be cancelled,” *Independent*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-news-electoral-commission-may-local-elections-cancelled-a9398131.html>

¹³ ITV News, “Coronavirus: Visitor restriction system introduced to keep Parliament open,” *ITV News*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-13/may-s-local-and-mayoral-elections-postponed-for-a-year-due-to-coronavirus>

¹⁴ Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, “Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections,” *Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

¹⁵ United National General Assembly, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” *United Nations* (1966). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

ICCPR reaffirms the right of the people to vote and be elected in periodic elections, it also establishes reasonable safeguards to manage voting and elections in unprecedented times. Article 4 of the ICCPR states:

In time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin.¹⁶

To understand the limitations and parameters of the “public emergency” provision of the ICCPR, this provision must be evaluated in light of the Human Rights Committee established under the ICCPR which decided General Comment No. 29 on Article 4 which notes that “measures derogating from the provisions of the Covenant must be of an exceptional and temporary nature.”¹⁷ In addition, “[1] the situation must amount to a public emergency which threatens the life of the nation, and [2] the State party must have officially proclaimed a state of emergency.”¹⁸ In the situation faced by the U.K. and its decision to postpone local elections, (1) the situation amounts to a public emergency that is exceptional and temporary in nature as Covid-19 has resulted in the death of 2.62 million people globally and 125,000 people in the U.K. alone¹⁹ and (2) prior to election postponement, the U.K. had already indicated to its citizens and publicly proclaimed a state of emergency as required when it invoked the Public Health Control of Disease Act (1984) and proposed the Health Protection Coronavirus Regulations (2020) legislation.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights Committee, “CCPR General Comment No. 29: Article 4: Derogations during a State of Emergency,” *United Nations*, August 31, 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fd1f.html>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Google News, “Coronavirus (COVID-19),” *Google*, March 8, 2021, <https://news.google.com/covid19/map?hl=en-US&mid=%2Fm%2F02j71&gl=US&ceid=US%3Aen>

Furthermore, at the time in which the U.K. chose to suspend local elections until the following year, Europe—Spain and Italy in particular—had been the Covid-19 hot spots resulting in many Covid-19-related deaths. Therefore, the U.K.’s decision to postpone local elections was reasonable and lawful under the given circumstances at the given time, however, it is difficult to justify the one-year postponement period which, on its face, does not seem to be reasonable and may well be a violation of democratic mores.

The U.K.’s postponement of its May 7, 2020, election was predicated on securing and protecting the national health of the country. Johnson, cabinet members, public health experts, and government officials remained concerned regarding the sanitation of polling stations. However, reasonable accommodations could have been applied to ensure that elections were held in a safe and reasonable manner. As correctly noted by the Institute for Government, “democracy should not be put on hold”²⁰ simply because PM Johnson and government officials failed to consider other safe avenues of voting. Rather than postponing elections for a whole year, the U.K. could have extended the election period by spreading it over a period of a few days to minimize the number of voters at a particular voting booth at a particular date or time. The U.K. could have also followed the U.S.’s example and conducted mail-in-ballots to all citizens or merely to at-risk citizens such as the elderly and those who are immunocompromised. Another viable and legitimate option would have included increasing the number of voting booths and outdoor voting sites and locations, as well as providing poll workers with “plastic screens, masks, gloves, sanitizer, and ventilation”²¹ – all of which could have reasonably been employed to mitigate the transmission of the virus. It is apparent that many options existed but were disregarded by government and health officials.

Very rarely should elections be postponed, as “putting democracy on hold should never be a decision that governments take – or are allowed to take – lightly or due to their

²⁰ Akash Paun, “Failure to prepare is not a reason for governments to postpone elections,” *Institute for Government*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/postpone-elections>

²¹ *Ibid.*

own avoidable failure to take action in good time.”²² While a sound and legitimate argument can be made to postpone local elections for a short period of time to allow government officials and workers time to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) and setup channels of communication to respond to the public emergency, a period of one year suspension on elections is capricious, undemocratic, and establishes a dangerous precedent. Understandably – at the time in which the U.K. chose to postpone local elections – legitimate fear existed amongst concerned citizens; however, society should not respond to fear with unwarranted radical measures, especially measures that undermine democratic values. “The year-long postponement of around 120 local elections, including the mayoralties of London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, was mentioned in passing, with no voices raised in opposition. The last time elections had been postponed for longer than a month was during the Second World War.”²³ Even at the height of the foot and mouth outbreak, then-PM Blair suspended elections for a period of only one month, not a period of one year. In evaluating the postponement of elections, a rational standard should always be applied, all options should be considered, and views should always be contested when faced with extreme measures.

Other states that have postponed their election cycle for a period of a year or more include Hong Kong, a decision which the Trump Administration has openly condemned, calling Hong Kong’s postponement undemocratic. At a July 2020 news briefing, former White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany denounced Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam’s decision to delay elections, saying “this action undermines the democratic processes and freedoms that have underpinned Hong Kong’s prosperity.”²⁴ It is

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Steve Bloomfield, “Coronavirus, the rise of “acceptable authoritarianism” and the battle for democracy,” *Prospect Magazine*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/coronavirus-the-rise-of-acceptable-authoritarianism-and-the-battle-for-democracy-united-states-china-trump-xi>

²⁴ Quint Forgy, “White House condemns Hong Kong election delay after Trump suggests postponing U.S. election,” *Politico*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/31/white-house-condemns-hong-kong-election-delay-389504>

disappointing that the U.K.'s decision postponing elections during COVID-19 provided cover for the Chinese decision to achieve the same undemocratic result in Hong Kong. The U.K., like the U.S., should serve as an example of consolidated and well-functioning democracies to the rest of the world.

Subversion of Civil Liberties and Freedoms

While the temporary suspension of elections in the U.K. remains controversial and represents a decay of democracy, other policy initiatives undertaken by the U.K. during the COVID pandemic are equally controversial.

Unreasonably Punitive Measures

On February 9, 2020, Matthew Hancock, the U.K. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, issued a statement saying, "Anyone who lies on the passenger locator form and tries to conceal that they have been in a country on the 'red list' in the ten days before arrival here, will face a prison sentence of up to ten years."²⁵ In addition to the potential of a ten-year prison sentence, other penalties include:

- (1) A £1,000 fine for any international arrival who fails to take a mandatory test.
- (2) A £2,000 penalty for any international arrival who fails to take the second mandatory test, as well as automatically extending their quarantine period to 14 days.
- (3) A £5,000 fixed penalty notice, rising to £10,000 for arrivals who fail to quarantine in a designated hotel.²⁶

To avoid the fines and penalty, anyone coming from one of the countries identified on the 'red list' must purchase a quarantine package costing £1,750, equivalent to US\$2,400 per person for quarantine accommodations, and must comply with all U.K. COVID

²⁵ Nicholas Cecil, "Covid quarantine: People caught lying about 'red list' country visits could face 10 years in prison," *Evening Standard*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/covid-quarantine-people-lying-red-list-countries-10-years-prison-b919129.html>

²⁶ *Ibid.*

regulations.²⁷ Currently, the U.K.'s 'red list' consists of 33 predominately countries predominantly from the Global South including from Central America, South America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Hancock's US\$2,400 mandatory quarantine package for individuals from 'red list' countries is essentially a temporary and discriminatory block on immigration. A family from one of the 'red list' countries will likely be unable to afford the US\$2,400 expense per family member, in addition to other costs associated with migrating to a foreign country. Thus, Hancock's restriction indefinitely bars those from lower socioeconomic statuses and poorer countries from immigrating and establishing roots in the U.K.

Hancock has justified the 'red list' and his radical Covid-19 measures as a response to a new Covid variant that has swept through much of the U.K. However, such measures cannot be justified. Under the various theories of legal punishment, Hancock's standard of punishment is excessive and resembles that of an autocratic regime. Immanuel Kant's retributive theory of punishment states that criminal punishment must be proportional to the offense committed.²⁸ Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian theory of punishment states that the criminal punishment must maximize social welfare by incapacitating the criminal to prevent further crimes.²⁹ Currently, Hancock's imposition of criminal punishment fails to meet the standards of either Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian theory or Immanuel Kant's retributive theory. The potential of a ten-year prison term with over £10,000 in fines for failing to comply with Covid regulations is evidently excessive and thus not proportional. Furthermore, Hancock's standard fails to maximize the overall welfare of society, as a prison sentence would require the U.K. government to utilize taxpayer money to house, feed, and take care of a prisoner for a period of up to ten years for a simple regulatory infraction. Despite public outcry against Hancock's imposition of criminal liability, and

²⁷ Pan Pylas, "Lying on arrival could mean 10 years in prison in England," *ABC News*, February 9, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/lying-arrival-10-years-prison-england-75782420>

²⁸ Alec Walen, "Retributive Justice," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [Last Updated] July 31, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice-retributive/>

²⁹ MIB Law, "Theories of Punishment – Utilitarian vs. Retribution Theorists," *MIB Law*, May 5, 2012, <http://www.miblaw.com/lawschool/theories-of-punishment-utilitarian-vs-retribution-theorists/>

rebuke from “former Supreme Court judge Lord Sumption who said lower tariffs exist for sex offences,”³⁰ Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has defended the ten-year prison sentence as appropriate, illustrating the U.K. government’s disproportionate concept of fairness and justice.³¹

In addition to his quasi-autocratic policies, Hancock has received notable backlash from citizens for his recent vaccine comments, calling into question his credentials to adequately and competently continue managing the U.K.’s Covid response. In recent interviews regarding vaccine deployment, Hancock was unembarrassed in stating “that the 2011 movie ‘Contagion’ helped to influence his approach on how best to roll out the Covid-19 vaccine in the U.K.”³² Frustrated locals concerned with Hancock’s management of the pandemic have also called into question the credentials of Duncan Selbie, the founding Chief Executive of the Public Health England, an agency within the U.K.’s Department of Health and Social Care. Selbie held the position as Chief Executive from 2013 to 2020 and oversaw preliminary aspects of the U.K.’s 2020 Covid-19 response. Despite holding this senior position administering public health policies, Selbie infamously told the *Lancet* in 2013 upon taking up the position, “You can fit my public health credentials on a postage stamp.”³³ Although the statement is over eight years old and Selbie has since left the position, many still blame him for the national stockpile of PPE that was left to decay in warehouses well past their use-by-date. A competent chief executive would have better prepared the nation for the pandemic with respect to PPE. Instead, Selbie instructed employees within his agency to simply change the “use-by-

³⁰ BBC News, “Covid-19: 10-year jail term for travel lies defended,” *BBC News*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56007798>

³¹ Greg Heffer, “COVID-19: 10-year jail sentences ‘appropriate’ for lying at UK border, says Transport Secretary Grant Shapps,” *Sky News*, February 10, 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-10-year-jail-sentences-appropriate-for-lying-at-uk-border-says-transport-secretary-grant-shapps-12213998>

³² Edmund DeMarche, “UK’s Matt Hancock says ‘Contagion’ helped inform him with COVID-19 vaccine rollout,” *Fox News*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/health/uks-matt-hancock-says-contagion-helped-inform-him-with-covid-19-vaccine-rollout>

³³ Ross Clark, “It’ll be no loss if Public Health England is put out of its misery,” *The Daily Telegraph*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/07/01/itll-no-loss-public-health-england-put-misery/>

date” labels on PPE in warehouses from 2016, to 2018, and then again to 2020 without every actually changing the PPE itself.³⁴

Vaccination Passports

In the wake of travel restrictions, heavy fines, and serious prison time, many British people fear that the U.K. may soon impose Covid-19 vaccine passports which would be required for both domestic and international travel as well as for day-to-day functions. In a February 2021 press conference, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab expressed the position that the U.K. government has not ruled out the possibility of a vaccine or immunity passport, and is still seriously considering the possibility of requiring residents to present a Covid-19 vaccine passport for travel and even for entering stores and facilities.³⁵ In response, Mark Harper, a Member of Parliament who chairs the Covid Recovery Group, objected to Raab’s consideration of vaccination passports, saying “For everyday life, I don’t think you want to require people to have a particular medical procedure before they can go about their day-to-day life.”³⁶ Over a quarter million people have already signed a petition urging the U.K. government not to introduce vaccine passports saying that passports “can be used to restrict the rights of people who have refused a Covid-19 vaccine.”³⁷

Sam Grant, the head of the U.K. human rights advocacy group, Liberty, has expressed grave concerns over vaccine or immunity passports that would “create a two-tier society where some people can access support and freedoms, while others are shut out - with the most marginalised among us hardest hit.”³⁸ The two-tier systems under the immunity passport recommendation would create more division and open the doors for

³⁴ Jonathan Freedland, “Failures of State review – never forget the Johnson government's Covid disasters,” *The Guardian*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/11/failures-of-state-review-never-forget-the-johnson-governments-covid-disasters>

³⁵ Jackie Salo, “‘Vaccine passports’ could be used inside the United Kingdom,” *New York Post*, February 14, 2021. <https://nypost.com/2021/02/14/vaccine-passports-could-be-used-in-uk-top-official-says/>

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ BBC News, “Covid: Thousands sign petition against vaccine passports,” *BBC News*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-56202975>

³⁸ *Ibid.*

discrimination and human rights violations, threatening the social fabric of British society. Furthermore, those who choose not to be vaccinated for medical, religious, or personal reasons and those who do not have access to vaccination, could be discriminated against in the employment selection and even prevented from entering grocery stores, houses of worship, schools, or government-run institutions. The possibility of discrimination is very real, as some employers and facilities have already considered implementing 'no jab, no job' rules which would deny unvaccinated people employment. Although the U.K. has not taken an official stance on the vaccination passport, many like former PM Tony Blair have indicated that the U.K. will be forced to impose vaccination passports as other countries begin mandating them for entrance into their respective countries, while others like current PM Boris Johnson have not taken a definitive stance but have not ruled out the option entirely.

Lockdown: Impact on Economy, Mental Health, and Domestic Violence

Economic Impact

The U.K.'s response to Covid-19 remains one of the most restrictive in Europe, yet Covid-related deaths in the U.K. remain the highest in Europe, even higher than France, Italy, Turkey, and Germany, despite the comparable population sizes, and comparable population density. In response to restrictive Covid orders throughout the U.S. and elsewhere, then-President Donald Trump among others often repeated the phrase "the cure cannot be worse than the problem itself,"³⁹ a sentiment that still holds true today. The entire planet has suffered tremendously at the expense of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in an effort to preserve human life, government institutions around the world have instituted mandatory lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus, including the U.K. However, such lockdowns come with a heavy price. The Associated Press (AP) in London reported that "the British economy suffered its biggest decline in more than 300 years in

³⁹ Maggie Haberman and David Sanger, "Trump Says Coronavirus Cure Cannot 'Be Worse Than the Problem Itself,'" *New York Times*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-restrictions.html>

2020 as the coronavirus pandemic closed shops and restaurants, devastated the travel industry and curtailed manufacturing.”⁴⁰ In 2020, the U.K. economy shrank by a staggering 9.9%, almost twice the figure of the 2009 financial crisis. While the U.K. suffered a 9.9% decrease in GDP, other industrial democracies such as the “French GDP shrank 8.3% last year, Germany 5% and the U.S. 3.5%.”⁴¹ Unfortunately for the U.K., “the Bank of England forecasts the economy will shrink by 4% in the first three months of 2021 because of the new lockdown.”⁴² While the Bank of England foresees the U.K. GDP regaining its pre-Covid size by early 2022 if vaccination continues as planned, economists remain less optimistic, citing that the U.K. has suffered its biggest drop in GDP since 1709 and will likely take longer to recover.⁴³

Mental Health Impact

While the economic impact of Covid-19 lockdowns cannot go unnoticed, neither can the impact of lockdowns on mental health. It is clear that government-mandated lockdowns had a deleterious impact on mental health, but there is no consensus yet on the extent of the impact, including on the number of suicide-related deaths. Based on a dataset provided by the U.K. Office for National Statistics (ONS),⁴⁴ the number of suicide-related deaths in England was significantly lower in quarter 2 (2020) – months of April, May and June – than other second quarters throughout the previous 20 years. According to the dataset which goes back to 2001, second quarter (2020) suicide related deaths totaled 845, which include the months of the initial Covid lockdown, while the range for suicide related deaths in the same quarter in the years from 2001 to 2019 ranged from 989

⁴⁰ Danica Kirka, “UK economy suffers biggest drop since 1709,” *Associated Press*, February 12, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-economy-4f0b6285a57c8b2929e2aceb864e7675>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² David Milliken and William Schomberg, “UK economy slumps by record 10% in 2020 after COVID hit,” *Reuters*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-economy/uk-economy-slumps-by-record-10-in-2020-after-covid-hit-idUSKBN2AC0KQ>

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Rabiya Nasir, Beth Manders and Ben Windsor-Shellard, “Dataset: Standard of proof suicide data,” *U.K. Office for National Statistics*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/standardofproofsuicidedata>

at the lowest end to 1,326 at the highest end in 2019. It is apparent that in the months of the initial 2020 lockdown, suicide-related deaths in England decreased to a 20-year low, however, it is not clear whether this was the result of the lockdowns.

In contrast to quarter 2 (2020), quarter 1 (2020) – the period immediately preceding the lockdown – saw the highest number of suicide-related deaths in twenty years, with 1,262 deaths. Similar to quarter 1 (2020), quarter 3 (2020) – the period immediately following the initial lockdown orders – also saw a similar trend to Quarter 1 (2020) with suicide-related deaths at 1,334, again marking the highest number of suicides in the last 20 years for that quarter. Some speculate that Covid-19 and the lockdown did little to impact suicide-related deaths, as the difference between suicides in quarter 1 (2020) and quarter 1 (2019) was a difference of 15 more deaths in 2020, and the difference between quarter 3 (2020) and quarter 3 (2019) was a difference of only 4 more deaths in 2020. One possibility that accounts for the difference in the 481 fewer deaths in quarter 2 (2020) than in the previous year's commensurate quarter, may either be attributed to an (1) error on-part of the ONS, failing to accurately account for suicide-related deaths during this period of time because it was at the height of the pandemic and thus difficult to accurately tabulate causes of death; or (2) the initial lockdown period did in fact help decrease the rate of suicide in England during the months of April, May and June. Currently, the evidence is inconclusive as public health experts continue to evaluate in the data.

While it is difficult to determine to what extent Covid-19 impacted suicide-related deaths, and while there is no consensus from the medical or public health community just yet, there is a consensus that the lockdowns did adversely impact mental health for many people living under the lockdown regulations. A recent “research published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that women, young adults, socially disadvantaged people, and people with pre-existing mental health problems reported the worst mental health outcomes in the initial six-week period of national lockdown.”⁴⁵ The same study

⁴⁵ Jacqui Wise, “Covid-19: Suicidal Thoughts Increased in Young Adults during Lockdown, UK Study Finds.” *British Medical Journal*, 2020, m4095. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4095>.

also found that “rates of suicidal thoughts have increased during lockdown, especially among young adults.”⁴⁶ Although the study did not address the number of suicides reported, it did find an overall increase in suicidal thoughts amongst its adult participants. The study showed an increase in suicidal thoughts from 8% to 10% amongst the collective 3,077 adult participants and a rise from 12.5% to 14% amongst its young adult participants, aged 18-29 years old.⁴⁷ The pandemic’s financial uncertainty, job displacement, lack of human-to-human interaction, isolation, and loneliness have only exacerbated the rates of depression in the U.K., creating another public health crisis that the U.K. National Health Service is not in a strong position to tackle while concentrating on combatting Covid-19. Furthermore, according to the ONS, it is estimated that “moderate to severe depressive symptoms are estimated to have almost tripled for 16 to 39-year-olds”⁴⁸ in June 2020 as compared to the period of July 2019 to March 2020.

Domestic Violence Impact

While many people have suffered mental health related issues from the shutdown, others have suffered physically from the increase in domestic violence cases. According to Karen Ingala Smith, the founder of Counting Dead Women, the rate of domestic abuse killings was “more than double” amid Covid-19 lockdowns.⁴⁹ Although ONS has acknowledged that cases of domestic violence have increased in the U.K. under the stay-at-home order – which result in victims being alone in confinement with their abusers for longer periods of time – ONS has nonetheless downplayed the cause of the domestic violence, avoiding casting blame on the government’s stay-at-home order. ONS notes that:

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Anna Collinson, “Covid: Lockdown had 'major impact' on mental health,” *BBC News*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-54616688>

⁴⁸ Luca Weinmann Al-Nawab, “Covid: Suicide prevention help calls during lockdown,” *BBC News*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-55751615>

⁴⁹ Jamie Grierson, “Domestic abuse killings 'more than double' amid Covid-19 lockdown,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/15/domestic-abuse-killings-more-than-double-amid-covid-19-lockdown>

Police recorded crime data show an increase in offences flagged as domestic abuse related during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, however, there has been a gradual increase in police recorded domestic abuse-related offences over recent years as police have improved their recording of these offences; therefore, it cannot be determined whether this increase can be directly attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.⁵⁰

Although ONS is correct in that recorded incidences of domestic violence increase as police data methods improve, ONS fails to consider that rates of domestic violence in the initial lockdown period more than doubled as compared with the previous year, which cannot be simply attributed to better police record keeping. ONS' disregard for the facts illustrates how the U.K. government is attempting to obscure the narrative in an effort to show that the U.K. response to Covid-19 was effective.

Conclusion: Constitutional Safeguard

The Covid-19 pandemic has undeniably altered many aspects of society both in the U.K. and across the globe. In response to the looming threat to public health and the general public's fear of the virus, many states, including the U.K., have enacted strict lockdown measures and restrictions, thus violating people's basic freedoms. The U.K.'s Covid regulations have become so intrusive that the government now dictates private corridors of people's lives, including the bedroom. The stay-at-home orders, travel restrictions, and limitation on human-to-human contact imposed by the U.K., "means that sex between single people, or established couples who don't cohabit, has in effect been either illegal, or against regulations, or only allowed outdoors. To give that a sense of scale, 40% of people - rising to 71% among 16- to 29-year-olds - don't live in a

⁵⁰ Nick Stripe, "Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020," Office for National Statistics, November 25, 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

couple.”⁵¹ People are longing for basic human contact, and the U.K. government, with a stroke of a pen, has singlehandedly outlawed many of the available options for people to simply engage in sexual interactions. In August 2020, Terrence Higgins Trust, the U.K.’s leading HIV and sexual health charity, published a statement “suggesting people avoid kissing, and wear a face covering and choose positions that aren't face-to-face during sex”⁵² to avoid contracting Covid-19. While the Terrence Higgins Trust is not a part of the U.K. government, such recommendations signify the radical extremes that British people have to undergo, even during sexual intercourse, to simply comply with this interpretation of U.K. lockdown regulations.

The U.K., along with only two other countries – Israel and New Zealand – does not have a constitution codified in a single document. The U.K.’s constitution may begin with the Magna Carta in 1215 but it simply comprises Parliamentary Acts, common law precedents, and conventions, which are subject to relatively easy change based on the executive branch, the parliament, or the courts. In contrast to the U.K., the U.S. has a codified constitution which outlines government’s roles and responsibilities, while delegating specific inalienable rights and protections to the people and which is difficult to amend. Without a codified constitution, it is easier for governments to intrude on civil rights. In early 2021, the U.K. government moved to constrict the right to protest under the *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021*. Michael Barton, the former chief constable of Durham police, “has warned that new protest laws move Britain dangerously towards ‘paramilitary policing’ and that UK ministers are ‘flexing their muscles via their police forces’ like repressive regimes around the world.”⁵³ The *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021*, a 307-page legislation, is being rushed through

⁵¹ Zoe Williams, “‘We are desperate for human contact’: the people breaking lockdown to have sex,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/feb/11/we-are-desperate-for-human-contact-the-people-breaking-lockdown-to-have-sex>

⁵² BBC News, “Sex and Covid: What are the rules in lockdown?” *BBC News*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53736087>

⁵³ Jamie Grierson, “Protest laws move UK towards paramilitary policing, says former chief,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/28/protest-laws-move-uk-towards-paramilitary-policing-says-former-chief>

parliament before citizens even have a chance to read its content. Human rights attorneys have criticized the ambiguity of the legislation and the speed at which it is being debated. While violent demonstrations should never be condoned and violent actors should be prosecuted, the proposed legislation goes a step further and criminalizes assemblages that “intentionally or recklessly cause a public nuisance.” On its face, this provision seems reasonable –average citizens and public services should not be interrupted by people protesting; however, the ambiguity of this provision is concerning. Under §59(1)(a)(ii), public nuisance is not explicitly defined yet the provision imposes criminal liability for anyone who creates a public nuisance. Although the proposed legislation is not directly related to Covid-19, many have criticized the U.K. government for proposing such a controversial legislation in the middle of a public health outbreak. Many have begun mass demonstrations across the U.K. in opposition to the proposed legislation, galvanizing the movement under the name “Kill the Bill.” In the wake of Kill the Bill demonstrations, police officers have threatened that “enforcement action will be taken, if needed, in the interests of public health,” to stop protestors from protesting.⁵⁴ The threat of using force to stop protests in the name of public health is another example of how the U.K. has used the Covid-19 pandemic to expand its overreach and powers.

In recent months, the British people have grown exhausted with the U.K. government’s expanding powers and failure to adequately balance public safety, health, and democracy. In September 2020, many rallied in London to protest against the severe lockdown measures in place. Protestors can be seen holding signs that read “the new abnormal, a cure worse than the disease.”⁵⁵ Another protestor can be seen dressed as a wolf holding a sign that says “obey,” representing the government, while another protestor is dressed as a sheep holding a sign that says, “stay asleep,” representing the British people.⁵⁶ More recently in March 2021, anti-lockdown protests across London

⁵⁴ Sky News, “COVID-19 police warning ahead of Kill the Bill protests,” *Sky News*, April 2, 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-police-warning-ahead-of-kill-the-bill-protests-12263605>

⁵⁵ BBC News, “Covid: Anti-restrictions protesters rally in London,” *BBC News*, September 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-54310520>

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

began again. Protestors are seen marching holding signs that read “stop destroying our kids’ lives,” calling on the U.K. government to open up public schools and to allow kids to aggregate once again and enjoy their lives as children. Despite the protest being entirely peaceful, police arrested 33 people for Covid breaches.⁵⁷

It is apparent that the U.K. government has sought to expand its power in the wake of Covid-19 using public health and emergency powers. While the U.K. was a member of the European Union, its citizens had recourse to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights which enforced it. Post-Brexit, the gap in human rights protections in the U.K. is stark. While the U.K. is unlikely at this stage to adopt a constitution, given its legal history and the need for extensive consultations in a constitutional convention, one step that the U.K. parliament should take is to adopt a bill of rights modeled on the European Convention it is no longer bound by.

⁵⁷ BBC News, “Covid: Arrests during anti-lockdown protests in London,” *BBC News*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56469687>

Chapter 11

VIETNAM: LOOKING BEYOND REGIME TYPE

Daphnée A.M. Fleurant

Is Regime Type a Relevant Consideration?

American political scientist Francis Fukuyama assessed that "the dividing line in effective crisis response"¹ is not based on the regime type, "but whether citizens trust their leaders, and whether those leaders preside over a competent and effective state".² This hypothesis is so far shown to be accurate in the case of Vietnam. Accordingly, both democratic and authoritarian governments are capable of effectively managing and leading in a time of crisis. The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has been a shared worldwide experience that has "triggered a global pandemic and economic contraction unlike anything seen for roughly a century"³ and has put our politics and political discourse front and center. While "less lethal than other recent disease, such as Ebola, Avian Influenza, and Tuberculosis"⁴, Covid-19 has pressure-tested not only the healthcare system infrastructure, but also the political infrastructure's capacity to support individual and community needs in a time of crisis. Nations of all sizes, shapes, and economic and political persuasions have been tested with varied success rates in this era of globalization and interconnectedness. The pandemic has provided us with a real-world case study in testing the Fukuyama assessment. It provides an opportunity for a multi-disciplinary study to review and evaluate how different political structures are able to navigate a crisis that impacted all of

¹ Francis Fukuyama, "The Thing That Determines a Country's Resistance to the Coronavirus", *The Atlantic*, March 30, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/thing-determines-how-well-countries-respond-coronavirus/609025/>

² Minh Vu & Bich T. Tran, "The Secret to Vietnam's COVID-19 Response Success: A review of Vietnam's response to COVID-19 and its implications", *The Diplomat*, April 18, 2020.

³ Phillip Y. Lipsky, "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis", Cambridge University Press, October 12, 2020, 1.

⁴ Ewen Callaway, David Cyranoski, Smriti Mallapaty, Emma Stoye & Jeff Tollefson, "The Coronavirus Pandemic in Five Powerful Charts", *Nature*, 579 (7800), 2020, 482-83.

humanity. Furthermore, it allows nations to determine good practices when planning for the next pandemic.

An interesting lesson learned from this global crisis is that "in general, levels of economic development or differences in political systems between countries had less of an impact"⁵ on predicting success rates. Instead, the Lowy Institute's study and data demonstrate that "smaller populations, cohesive societies and capable institutions have proved to be bigger factors"⁶ in achieving success. The need to decouple the politics or regime type from the politics of managing a crisis is paramount. This gives policy makers an opportunity to refocus attention to which public policies and implementation strategies are most effective in crisis response. One early conclusion from the Vietnam example is that there is no necessary correlation between democracy and a government's capacity to navigate successfully through a public health emergency.

A Proactive Government

This chapter focuses on the actions taken by the Vietnamese government and its success in weathering this crisis with such success. Vietnam's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak within its borders has been touted as best in class. The step-by-step government actions of strict containment led to the nation's successful management of the pandemic. This achievement is particularly noteworthy in the light of Vietnamese geography and demography. Vietnam shares an approximately 800-mile border with China where the pandemic first emerged. The population of almost one hundred million has a density of 813 people per square mile, thus ensuring intense human-to-human contact.⁷ Its success is also remarkable considering that Vietnam is a developing country with a GDP per capita of only US\$2,700 in 2019.⁸ When compared to countries like the US (US\$65,000), UK (US\$42,000) or Italy (US\$33,000),⁹ one can

⁵ Minh Nga, "Vietnam Ranks Second in World COVID-19 Response", *VNExpress International*, January 28, 2021.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Worldometer, "Vietnam Population (LIVE)", Vietnam Population (2021) – Worldometer, Worldometer, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/vietnam-population/>

⁸ The World Bank, "The World Bank In Vietnam", Vietnam Overview, The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview>

⁹ The World Bank, "Indicators", Indicators | Data, The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>

see that Vietnam outperformed G7 and G20 countries regardless of wealth, geography, or regime type.

According to commentators, "the Vietnamese response is characterized by rapid response, clear leadership, a multi-sectoral approach, and supported by clinical care and a public health response".¹⁰ This was largely the result of preparation that was hard earned through previous contact with pandemics. Vietnam planned and implemented measures to prevent and control Covid-19 based on their past exposure to the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) health crisis. That institutional learning enabled a centralized and coherent strategy to be quickly put in place in response to the new threat. Up to May 2021, Vietnam boasts a remarkably low infection rate of only 3,000 cases.¹¹ Clearly, the Vietnamese government policies were timely and effective. Vietnam's "use of emergency control measures in the epidemic areas and integration of resources from multiple sectors including health, mass media, transportation, education, public affairs, and defense"¹² enabled it to successfully react to each escalation of the pandemic. Vietnam's institutions were able to incorporate what they learned from the SARS outbreak and use that knowledge to frame its policies towards combating Covid-19. The authorities were able to understand and learn the many weakness that existed in their healthcare system through the encounter with SARS, a less severe health crisis and thus a relatively low-cost learning experience. The time lapse between SARS and Covid-19 was short enough to still be memorable but had enough distance to enable new response methodologies to develop. This resulted in the best practices that Vietnam was able implement in response to Covid-19.

The First Wave

To better understand how that success was achieved, it is important to analyze the timeline of events regarding Covid-19 and the public discourse, policies, and actions taken in coordination by the authorities in Vietnam. The first cases of a "pneumonia with unknown

¹⁰ Bui Thi Thu Ha, La Ngoc Quang, Tolib Mirzoev, Nguyen Trong Tai, Pham Quang Thai & Phung Cong Dinh, "Combating the COVID-19 Epidemic: Experiences from Vietnam", *International Journal Environmental Research Public Health* 17(9):3125, April 30, 2020, 5.

¹¹ Worldometer, "Vietnam", Worldometer, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/viet-nam/>.

¹² Heritage Foundation, "2020 Index of Economic Freedom." Index of Economic Freedom: Promoting Economic Opportunity and Prosperity by Country. Heritage Foundation, <https://www.heritage.org/index/>

etiology or cause, detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China” was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office on December 31, 2019.¹³ Vietnamese authorities began a dialogue with its citizens by providing scientific news and updates on Covid-19 via health promotion activities. In those communications, Vietnamese people were advised not to be in contact with individuals with respiratory indicators and the importance of maintaining personal hygiene. The government also immediately conducted a risks assessment in January 2020, with minimal indication of how transmissible or deadly the new virus could become. Additionally, "on January 14, 2020, the General Department of Preventative Medicine said that the coronavirus situation in China was being closely monitored while the Ministry of Health devised response plans in case the virus did manage to enter the country."¹⁴ Furthermore, prior to the first recorded case, the Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen Xuan Phuc was directly communicating and reinforcing the health promotion activities to his citizens on the need to practice good personal hygiene and mask-wearing in public spaces. The government had the apparatus and institutional memory of SARS to draw upon which pointed to the need to have that dialogue with its citizens who in turn had societal memory on the need to be responsive during a health crisis. The government provided clear, concise, and consistent communications. It was proactive and rapid in its responses. The WHO emphasizes preparedness as the key to enable a healthcare system to withstand a pandemic. The long habit of top-down communications between the government and the people of Vietnam provided it with the preparedness to address a health crisis. Clear communications were established once the first case was reported in Wuhan and the first wave was taking place.

The first known case in Vietnam was declared on or about January 23, 2020, despite the nation's robust preventive measures. The Vietnamese authorities responded by immediately establishing the National Steering Committee to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19. On January 24, 2020, "all flights from and to Wuhan were halted despite the World Health Organization (WHO) saying there was no need for widespread travel bans at that point in

¹³ Thu Ha, et al., *op cit*, 1.

¹⁴ Phan Anh, "How Vietnam fought a pandemic and won" *VNExpress*, December 22, 2020.

time."¹⁵ A Taskforce Group on Covid-19 was established by January 30, 2021, enabling all relevant ministries to come together, create a strategy, direct resources, and gear up the propaganda machinery to prevent and control the spread. Leaders in Vietnam's were decisive and clear on what they needed to do to protect their people. They understood that with their country's relatively vulnerable healthcare system and its proximity to China, immediately attention and well-timed interventions was paramount. A coordinated national response to Covid-19 came into effect (See Annex #1). A multi-sectoral approach was evident at the onset of Vietnam's response to the crisis. By February 1, 2020, all flights to China had been halted, first community transmission was declared, and the Prime Minister declared an epidemic outbreak in Vietnam. These actions were drawn from scientific advice and based on the lessons learned from the public health response to SARS.

With the Prime Minister's declaration, Vietnam's strategies for combatting Covid-19 became all-encompassing. It included government directives of strict border controls and visa requirements. It also meant that all individuals entering the country needed to be quarantined for fourteen days. Contact tracing and preventative measures, including isolation for those exposed within its borders, were set up. Screening and testing infrastructure was put in place including "thermal screening and health checkpoints set up at all immigration ports, air, sea and land borders"¹⁶ with China. Furthermore, the response rate of the Vietnamese people was in alignment with their government actions. The people bought and wore masks, schools were closed after the Lunar New Year break, and all those who were able to work from home, did so. The government did not try to politicize its public policies in its response to Covid-19. It also did not try to sugar coat the possible threat. Instead, the information given to the public was unvarnished and guided by science. The government used the analogy that Covid-19 was equivalent to a national security threat. Allocation of resources reflected the seriousness of the threat and aligned with the messaging coming out of the government propaganda machinery.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ha-Linh Quach and Ngoc-Anh Hoang, " COVID-19 in Vietnam: A Lesson of Pre-preparation", *Journal of Clinical Virology* 127 (2020) 104379, page 1.

The policy was that when multiple cases were traced to a community, the authorities instituted a lockdown for twenty-one days. The lockdown was initiated after eleven cases were found in a community of approximately 1,000 people near Hanoi. The lockdown policies required all inhabitants in the commune to be "tested and checked for symptoms daily. Resources for food and all necessities will be provided free of charge, all households and the outdoor environment were sterilized frequently."¹⁷ The first stage of cases were linked to travel to Wuhan. A holistic and coherent approach to Covid-19 was rolled out nationwide. Vietnam's holistic approach to combating this crisis started at the top and cascaded through all segments of society. Social and financial support was incorporated and embedded in the planning. This not only protected the healthcare system from being overwhelmed, but it also met the social and financial needs of the citizenry.

"All charges for testing SARS-CoV-2 were free for all suspected cases and close contact of cases, every confirmed case was admitted to hospital for free isolation and treatment. Food and accommodation were provided free of charge during quarantine period regardless of nationality. Companies were encouraged to apply remote working, and students can access lessons from national television programmes and internet learning."¹⁸

By March 21, 2020, Vietnam borders were closed with only repatriations flights permissible. By the end of the month, a fifteen day nationwide social distance rule was announced starting on April 1, 2020. This nationwide policy shut down all non-essential services and ordered everyone to stay home apart from buying food or medicines and other emergencies. By the end of April, the first wave came to an end with nationwide social distancing directives being lifted and the economy being kick-started.

Vietnam's first wave response is marked by the political apparatus having a single voice and working closely with citizens in controlling and preventing the spread of Covid-19. Vietnamese society showed resilience, innovation, and a collective will. An example of this innovation can be seen in Vietnam's Health Ministry, in collaboration with a popular songwriter

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

Khac Hung and performed by Min and Erik, creating a remix of a pop song "Ghen" (Jealousy) called "Ghen Co Vy" that went viral on TikTok with a dance challenge. "Vietnam made a song about washing your hands to prevent coronavirus infections" that is catchy and impactful from all walks of life in Vietnam.¹⁹ It was recognized by UNICEF²⁰ and pop culture icons for a way of communicating a simple message that is memorable. In summary, the various policies that were implemented allowed the healthcare system not to be overwhelmed and were structured in a manner that focused on building "public health capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease".²¹

The Second and Third Waves

The second wave started on or about July 20, 2021, with an infection that had no known source. Contact tracing measures were implemented followed by lockdown in the city of Da Nang. Infection rates grew to over 500 cases in less than one month causing a semi-lockdown directive from the government. It was during the second wave that the first Covid-19 fatality was reported, and two more weeks of semi-lockdown were directed. During the second wave, a total of 34 fatalities were reported, most of whom being elderly people. September 3, 2020, marked the end of the second wave. The third wave started on November 29, 2020, due to violations of the nationwide quarantine protocols. The fact that the first major violation took place eleven plus months after the January 14, 2020, General Department of Preventative Medicine message is remarkable. By the time the infection was detected, three others were infected, thus ending three months of no community transmission in Vietnam. Possible charges are pending for this violation with a potential sentence of twelve years in prison for spreading a known contagious disease in violation of health rules. Inbound flights were suspended on December 1, 2020. Consistent application of its policies during the entirety of the pandemic has granted the Vietnam public confidence in their government's ability to effectively manage the

¹⁹ VHBO, "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver – Coronavirus", VHBO, April 20, 2020.

²⁰ UNICEF, "We love this handwashing dance from Vietnamese dancer, Quang Đăng. Washing your hands with soap and water is one of the first steps to protect yourself from #coronavirus." Facebook, March 3, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=199220537813698>

²¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Vietnam Responds to COVID-19 with Technical Support from CDC", Global Health Stories, CDC, February 19, 2020.

pandemic at every stage. Consistent messaging contributed to the high compliance rate of the Vietnamese people. That high rate is not only because of the one-party authoritarian style government. It is also due to the public perceptions of the government's competence in handling the health emergency.

Vietnam's success at flattening the curve in stages I, II, and III is the result of the political, social, and economic alignment that created the environment in which the government was able to operationalize a coherent response within its borders. Future analyses need to discard simple dichotomies of autocracies versus democracies. The government prepared for an outbreak before the first case was declared due to its trial by SARS. Returning to Fukuyama's perspective,

"there will be some high-performing autocracies, and some with disastrous outcomes. There will be a similar, though likely smaller, variance in outcomes among democracies. The crucial determinant in performance will not be the type of regime, but the state's capacity and, above all, trust in government"²²

by its citizenry when responding to a pandemic. Vietnam had multiple contributing factors which enable the government to make its decision quickly on the threat via its risk assessment, develop policies that were aligned with these decisions and enact policies in support of those decisions promptly. An all-inclusive approach was executed that delayed infection rates, gave everyone time to better prepare for the coming storm and effectively managed the pandemic. In each stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, characterized from unknown "life-threatening, rapidly propagating threat and pervasive uncertainty over basic questions such as the nature of the virus and efficacy of response measures,"²³ Vietnam successfully navigated its way through.

Vietnam's low-cost response model was successful primarily because of its one-party system. What it lacks in resources, it made up for its ability to implement harsh policies without opposition. Additionally, Vietnam proactive response was a competitive advantage that was a direct result of its SARS experience. All in all, the government's ability to restrict movements

²² Fukuyama, *op cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*

whenever it felt it necessary without fear of violating individual liberty enable flows from the political system. Bold and decisive steps can be taken when there are no checks and balances. Vietnam's success does not necessarily mean that a democratic government could not have been as bold or decisive in combatting the coronavirus. But a democratic government would have less room for free maneuver. Consensus would ideally have to be sought in a democratic government, a requirement with which Vietnam did not have to bother.

Vietnam's Healthcare Infrastructure

The fragility of Vietnam's healthcare system and infrastructure reflects its developing country economic status. Vietnam's vulnerable healthcare system makes prevention a priority. A low-cost approach was implemented with high levels of biosecurity at immigration points as the first defense. But low-cost does not mean low manpower. One-party systems tend to have ample human resources at their disposal to implement robust case finding, tracing, and recording apparatus. The progressive nature of the measures implemented to address the fast-evolving disease were also an effective tool utilized by the healthcare system.²⁴

Yet despite its fragility, Vietnam's healthcare system was successful at developing its own COVID-19 vaccines. Public policies that enabled this breakthrough included "prioritizing domestic production of a vaccine as a way to ensure it has enough inoculations for its population"²⁵ with export opportunities being a secondary motive. Nanocovax, a made-in-Vietnam Covid-19 vaccine, was researched, developed, and carefully tested in 2021 for rollout by Ho Chi Minh City based Nanogen Pharma Company. So far, Nanocovax has been tested on animals and has completed fifty percent of its phase 2 for clinical trials in human patients. Phase 1 trial of Trial of Nanocovax took place from December 17, 2020 to February 7, 2021. "Results of phase 1 showed that Nanocovax vaccine can prevent variant SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.7 from the UK. In phase 2, the research team will continue to evaluate the protective effectiveness of the vaccine with other variants."²⁶ Developing a vaccine from Phase 1 to launch as well as manufacturing

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Tomoya Onishi, "Vietnam Eyes Launch of Homemade COVID-19 Vaccine in Second Half of 2021", *Nikkei Asia*, December 11, 2020.

²⁶ Thuy. Hanh, "Vietnam's Covid-19 Vaccine Completes 50% of Phase 2 Trial." *VietReader*.

and distribution is a big step for Vietnam. With Asian countries months away from receiving vaccines from Western pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, AstraZeneca, and Moderna, Nanocovax would give Vietnam considerable confidence. To have a domestic vaccine would give the country a level of autonomy that many developing countries currently lack. Coupled with how its handling the pandemic so far, Vietnam is poised to showcase itself both regionally and globally. It would also give it more control in its effort at vaccinating its people in order to fully re-open its borders and economy. This would be a validation of the policies and strategies government officials have implemented since January 2020.

Conclusion

The economic effects of the Covid-19 epidemic were felt globally. Vietnam is plugged into the global economy and had to withstand the downturn. Yet Vietnam has overperformed in its response to Covid-19 taking into account the size of its economy, its healthcare infrastructure, and its global political influence. The country's excellent control measures were simple and straightforward. It was able to develop its own vaccine, Nanocovax, domestically. The policy measures it created and implemented have enabled Vietnam to have not only one of the lowest totals of Covid-19 infection rates and fatalities, but it also has strong projected economic growth in 2021. According to the International Monetary Fund, Vietnam's 2021 growth rate of 6.5 percent gives it a leg up in its recovery and its 2.4 percent 2020 growth is one of the highest economic rates in the world.²⁷ The pandemic has nevertheless impacted Vietnam's economy and job market. Unemployment is up and will continue to rise.²⁸ However, in comparison with the global economy, Vietnam is doing remarkably well.

Vietnam's success was acknowledged by the Lowy Institute, which found that Vietnam came second in its index of countries successfully handling Covid-19. The Lowy Institute Covid Performance Index evaluated in March 2021 approximately 98 countries and territories handling

March 12, 2021. <https://vietreader.com/news/36285-vietnams-covid-19-vaccine-completes-50-of-phase-2-trial.html>.

²⁷ International Monetary Fund., "Vietnam." Vietnam and the IMF. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/VNM>.

²⁸ Anh Tu, "H1 GDP growth hits 10-year low" *VNExpress International*, June 20, 2020.

the Covid-19 "outbreaks based on the availability of data across six indicators: confirmed cases, confirmed deaths, confirmed cases per million people, confirmed deaths per million people, confirmed cases as a proportion of tests and tests per a thousand people".²⁹ Coming in the top spot was New Zealand with a score of 94.4, with Vietnam getting the second spot with an average score of 90.8 out of 100. The number three, four, and five spots went to Taiwan, Thailand, and Cyprus. The US unfortunately is among the world's worst pandemic hotspot, being fifth from the bottom. With 35 fatalities to date and approximately 3,000 confirmed cases, Vietnam has weathered the storm. Since the first case was identified, Vietnam has been able to excel in controlling and preventing the spread of infections. This was done through rapid response, strong leadership and coordination that was clear in its intention and strategies. This has resulted in rapid case detection and isolation, rigorous contact tracing, and strict quarantine measures.

The nations of the world had an opportunity to showcase their capabilities at performing their most basic responsibility: keeping their people safe. While there were degree of successes and failures throughout the different cycles of the pandemic, Vietnam is one of a handful of countries that was able to meet the challenges at each stage and protect its people with a balanced approach. The one-party system meant that consultation between an executive and legislative branch, for example, was not a necessary step that needed to be undertaken before triggering actions. The one-party system also enables the multi-sectoral approach to be executed because all aspect of the government were controlled by a single party. The state had absolute authority on this matter and "as a single-party state, with large and well-organized military and security services"³⁰ could implement its will. The one-party structure also means that the culture of surveillance was prevalent, and indeed imbedded in Vietnam. Culturally, citizens have been conditioned to spy and report on fellow citizens if they suspect any wrongdoing. Freedom of speech is not a protected right and "anyone found sharing fake news and misinformation about

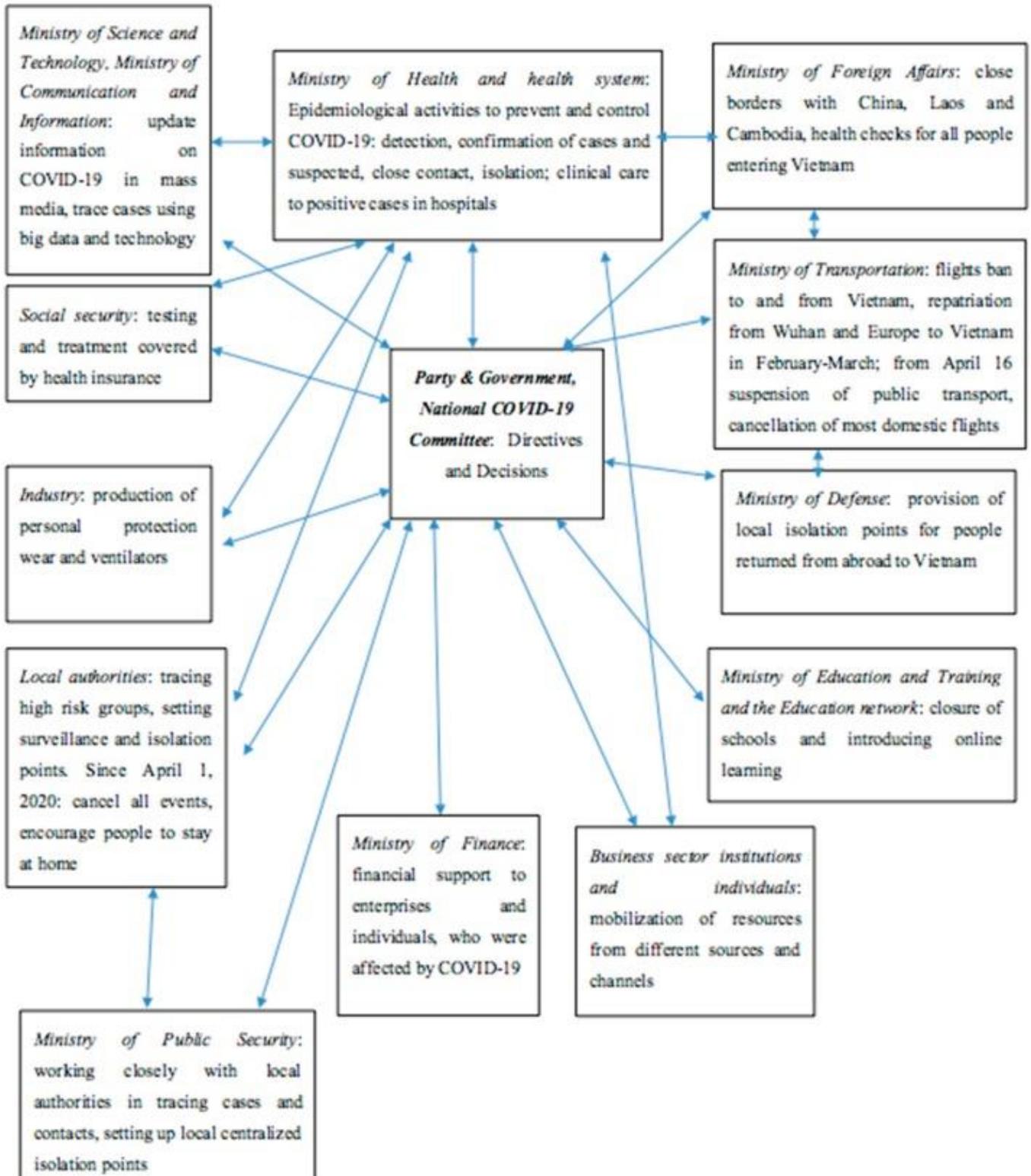
²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the coronavirus risks a visit from the police, and around 800 people have been fined so far."³¹ The spread of disinformation was not as prevalent in Vietnam as it was in the US.

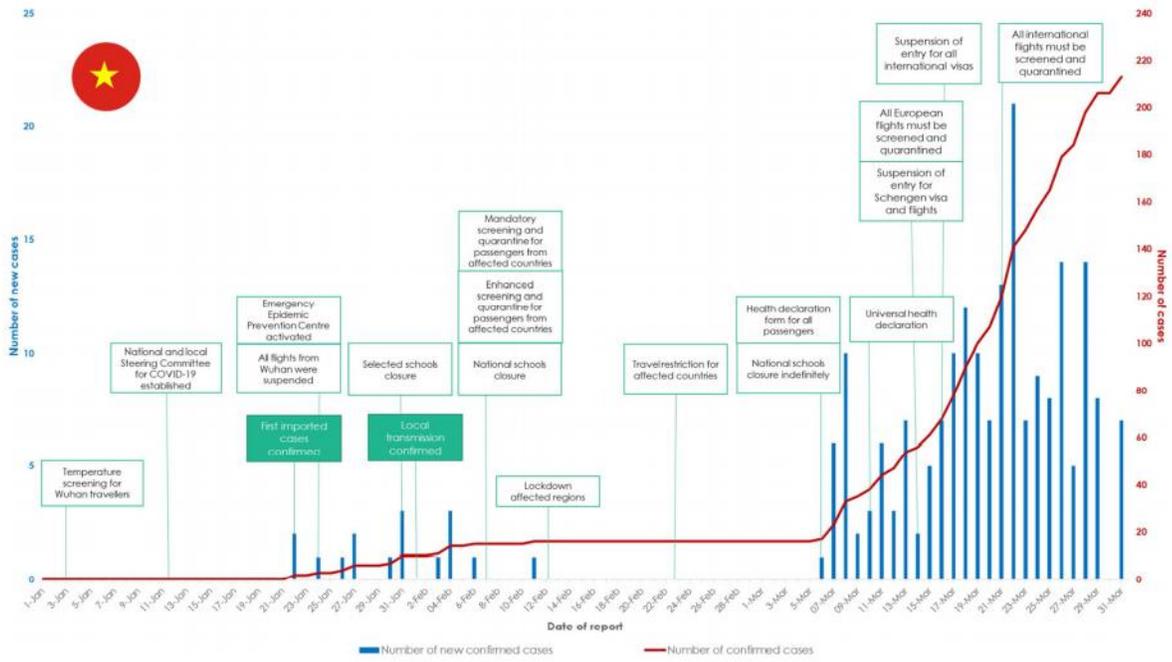
Most importantly, the government did not overreach and use Covid-19 to grab additional power and control. The Vietnamese government exercised restraint and provided a surprising level of transparency and accountability about the pandemic to its citizens. Vietnam's citizenry in turn aligned their actions to the guidance provided. Vietnam showed that autocracies can be effective in dealing with a global health crisis. Good and sound governance can exist regardless of political ideology.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Annex 1: Vietnam's Coordinated National Response to COVID-19.³²

³² Thu Ha, et al., *op cit*, 4.

Annex 2: Public Health Interventions to Control COVID-19 Spread in Vietnam



Chapter 12

CONCLUSIONS, CONSTATATIONS AND CONCERNS

Roland Rich

Beware of intuition! This project began with a widely-held piece of intuitive thinking based on the supposedly clear evidence of unfolding developments. After a few weeks of hesitation because it was perceived initially to be politically inconvenient, China snapped to attention and instituted a sharp lockdown, tolerating no exceptions. It worked! A few weeks later, Europe and the United States faced the same problem. Neither side of the Atlantic was able to replicate China's success. The intuitive conclusion was that authoritarianism works better than democracy in an emergency situation. This project was intended to test the proposition in a more rigorous, though not an exhaustive, manner.

As a political science program, it was natural to gravitate towards the issue of regime type. But the chapter authors did not limit their investigations to this issue. Their investigations pursued the trajectory of the response to the pandemic in each country. And the authors also sought alternative explanations of success or failure. Accordingly, the discussion migrated beyond regime type to encompass other salient factors. It is of little surprise that those ever-reliable explanatory disciplines, geography and history, have an outsized role to play. And, regardless of regime type, the politics of the nation insinuated itself into the national response. Chinese doctors were aware of the novel coronavirus at least in December 2019,¹ but information was suppressed so as not to disturb important communist party meetings then taking place in Wuhan, thus allowing the infection to spread for several weeks. This will strike outsiders as self-delusional because communist party meetings are as closely scripted as a Moscow show trial,

¹ Hannah Beech, "The Saturday Profile (of Dr Wang Linfa)", *New York Times*, 13 June 2020

but the internal politics of the communist party dictated the outcome. Domestic politics cast its shadow over the national response in other countries, occasionally to enlighten and contribute to a national consensus, but more usually to complicate and delay the search for a solution.

Four of the chapters deal with federal systems and thus open the possibility of drawing some tentative conclusions from this small sub-set. Inevitably, any comment on federalism must also include observations about the response of the United States. Without wishing to put this forward even as a working hypothesis, the small sub-set study nevertheless leads to a nagging thought – that the Tolstoy dictum is turned on its head. All successful federal systems are successful for their own different reasons, while all unsuccessful federal systems are unsuccessful for a single basic reason, the specter of authoritarianism.

Several of the chapters refer to the concept of trust. It is clearly a salient factor, but it is difficult to calculate its impact. One could perhaps make the backward-looking argument that those nations successfully managing the pandemic did so, in part at least, because the populace had trust in government and its institutions. Opinion polling may provide a clue, but none of the chapters went down that path, and in any case, polling is notoriously unreliable in autocratic settings. Yet the concept needs exploration. Is trust obtained because those living in the nation have built up confidence in institutional capacity to deliver? Or is trust merely a survival instinct of compliance in an authoritarian system? The issue is of particular relevance in the United States where suspicion of government has become a critical part of the polarization divide.

And where has the pandemic left democracy? Democracy was already under assault from within, with doubts about its efficacy compounded by the attacks of demagogues. There was already a worldwide resurgence of autocracy led by China and Russia. There is a case to be made that the post-Cold War period is over, and that the world has returned to political contestation mode, the prize being the hearts and minds of the people of the global South. Has the pandemic triggered an intuitive view that democracy is not the appropriate way for developing countries to deal with this crisis? One of the purposes of this publication is to examine the various national responses and thus counter the intuitive allure of authoritarianism as the default mode of governance in a crisis. One method available to democracies is the

declaration of an emergency to enhance government powers. Is this a solution or a step down the path to authoritarianism?

This chapter is not a summary of the book, but it draws on the previous chapters to investigate conclusions. Just as the chapter authors brought their personal perspectives to bear, the concluding chapter reflects the views of its author, thus absolving the other contributors of any complicity. The concluding chapter also benefits from a slightly higher temporal perch. Whereas the country chapters were written in March, this chapter was written in May after the completion of the semester. The world changed in those two months, particularly in relation to the availability of vaccines. The early salvos of vaccine politics figure in some of the chapters and the issues will be examined briefly in this chapter. Those issues range surprisingly widely from vaccine development as a form of nationalism, to vaccine diplomacy as a weapon in the contest for hearts and minds, to questions of international cooperation or the lack thereof.

By the time readers engage with this book, the world will again have changed. There are new books emerging about the 1918 pandemic one century after the event.² It is not even clear where the world is situated in the saga of this pandemic. The arrival of vaccines suggested the world was entering the final phase. But the inevitable mutation of the virus triggers doubts. Is the future inoculated Israel or infected India? This book can only provide a snapshot at a particular moment. But, because that moment is more than one year after the virus conquered the planet, it is instructive.

Geography

Is geography destiny? This is certainly one reading of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*.³ Diamond explains how the development of human societies is dependent on the animals and crops that surround them, the weather they endure, and the geographic barriers to

² John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, Penguin, 2005. Harry P. Rider, *The Spanish Influenza: The History Of The 1918 Spanish Flu With Real Stories. Discover What The Humanity Has Learned About This Plague And What Lessons We Can Use For Future Pandemics*, Lions Corporate Ltd, 2020. Catharine Arnold, *Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts from the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History*, St Martin's Griffin, 2020

³ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, W.W. Norton, 1997

movement. The explanation is convincing insofar as it deals with millennial developments in pre-history. Geography is destiny in this context. But when Diamond attempts to explain the trajectory of European history over the past couple of thousand years by reference to mountain ranges and access to the sea, his analysis becomes less convincing. In the common era European context, geography must compete with other forces shaping society.

Peter Watson's *The Great Divide: Nature and Human Nature in the Old World and the New*,⁴ is an ambitious comparative study of the civilizations on both sides of the Atlantic with a particular focus on the disappearance of human sacrifice in Europe compared to its persistence in pre-Columbian America. Watson dismisses cultural or genetic explanations but focuses on geography and its close cousin, climate. The wildness of weather in the Americas, the activity of volcanoes, and the fear of drought are the ingredients that lead to human sacrifice intended to appease the elements. Once again, geography is destiny.

To what extent did geography determine the success or otherwise of national responses to the pandemic? According to Ryan Prieto's chapter on Taiwan, geography played a key part in this success story. Eliminating infection from external sources allows a government to focus on community transmission. Islands have a natural advantage in controlling points of ingress. It is impossible to hermetically seal any island. Determined intrusions can succeed. But this respiratory virus did not lend itself to the sort of personal or strategic advantage that would lead a carrier to wish surreptitiously to cross an international border. It is the casual traveler against whom an island needs protection in the Covid-19 context and thus policing the entry points at seaports and airports is sufficient to control the possibility of infection from travelers. Prieto's essay makes the point that Taiwan, along with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, had a natural advantage in its control strategy.

Australia may be a continent the size of continental USA, but it is also an island, in fact, two major islands. As Shahinaz Abdelhamid points out in her chapter examining Australia's response, early control of the points of entry gave Australia a flying start in its Covid-19 strategy.

⁴ Peter Watson, *The Great Divide: Nature and Human Nature in the Old World and the New*, Harper NY, 2013

Complemented by effective lockdowns to stop community transmission, the Australian strategy was successful...up to a point. Here we see the limits of geography as destiny because the concept of control requires more than the advantages of geography, it requires human intervention. And as Australia amply demonstrated, that intervention can be flawed.

The example of the United Kingdom, or perhaps simply the island of Great Britain, again belies any notion of geography as destiny because, even after Brexit, Great Britain is closely linked to the Continent. Early hesitation on the part of the government precluded replicating the success of other islands. That hesitation is understandable in the European context to which the United Kingdom, however distasteful this may be for some, belongs. One of the great achievements of the ongoing European experiment in regionalism is the freedom of movement of its people across national borders. The UK was never a part of Schengenland which formalized this freedom among its treaty parties, but it was imbued by its spirit. Even in a post-Brexit world, the government of the UK did not consider itself politically enabled to close its borders to the outside world.

And geography was not destiny for a nation that is part of the Asian mainland but nevertheless succeeded in its Covid-19 control strategy, as Daphnée Fleurant makes clear in her chapter on Vietnam. Yet, in some ways, Vietnam belies its almost three thousand miles of land borders and behaves politically as an island. The tightly guarded land borders with Cambodia and China reflect the frosty relations Vietnam has with both countries. Access is limited through the few official entry points. Vietnam has warm relations with Laos, though there is a mighty ongoing battle with China which is attempting to wrest the mantle of suzerainty from Vietnam, but the Annamite Range forms a natural boundary between the two countries with few roads crossing them. Another example of a nation which is part of the mainland of East Asia but in effect has all the advantages of an island is South Korea. Its only land border, with the fractious fraternal nation to the North, is protected by an almost impenetrable demilitarized zone.

The island of Great Britain had little choice but to behave as part of the Continent, and the mainland nation of Vietnam was able to behave politically as an island. Geography may be

destiny but, as these examples demonstrate, the impact of geography is not fixed. Even geography can be in thrall to politics and international relations.

History

Every nation is in thrall to its own history. But it is not the *longue durée* form of history that will be broached in this chapter. That form is necessarily relevant. It explains political culture which underpins the national responses to the pandemic. But it is beyond the scope of this book to enter that tricky terrain. The most telling aspect of history for the purpose of understanding the immediate response to the pandemic is of a far more recent and focused variety. Was there a recent history of tackling a pandemic?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory disease caused by a SARS-associated coronavirus. It was first identified at the end of February 2003 during an outbreak that emerged in China and spread to 4 other countries. SARS is an airborne virus and can spread through small droplets of saliva in a similar way to the cold and influenza.⁵

The four countries mentioned are Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Vietnam.⁶ But all of East Asia went on alert at that time. The author well recalls traveling through the region and being confronted at airports with temperature checks and questionnaires, while the use of face masks quickly became widespread.

SARS was a dress rehearsal for Covid-19. And just as a theatrical dress rehearsal teaches its lessons beyond the actors and musicians, to the producers, directors, stagehands, and lighting technicians, so did SARS teach lessons to governments, bureaucrats, medical institutions, and the populace at large. Both the Taiwan and Vietnam chapters credit SARS with preparing the two countries for the new pandemic. Policies were in place, lines of authority were known, precautionary measures were well practiced, and the public considered itself well drilled. This

⁵ World Health Organization, "Syndrome (SARS)", https://www.who.int/health-topics/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome#tab=tab_1

⁶ World Health Organization, "Cumulative Number of Reported Probable Cases of SARS", https://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/2003_07_11/en/

story was repeated beyond China and the four most affected countries. Countries like South Korea, Japan and the Philippines put their precautionary policies and practices in place after SARS. And Australia and New Zealand, though not greatly affected by SARS, understood that they were also part of the region and prepared accordingly. The same cannot be said for Europe or the Americas.

SARS did not impact Africa. South Africa, with a single case, is the only African country listed on the WHO list.⁷ But Africa was better prepared to tackle a pandemic than many far wealthier countries and regions. That is because the answer to the overriding historical question posed at the outset, was there a recent history of tackling a pandemic, is in the affirmative. Susan Ombwayo's chapter on Uganda highlights how preparedness to deal with an outbreak of Ebola went beyond the most affected countries in West Africa. The other regions of Africa, North, East, Central and South, all braced themselves for the possibility of an Ebola outbreak by preparing policies and personnel to deal with it. Ebola is a terrifying hemorrhagic disease, while Covid-19 is an insidious respiratory disease, but the policies in response to both, containment and quarantine, are not too dissimilar.

Africa was ready and it had a demographic advantage. As Delaney Charydczak points out in her chapter on South Africa, while the wealthy West is grappling with an aging society, African nations have a youth bulge. Covid-19 discriminates against the elderly. And wealthy countries tend to warehouse their elderly in facilities which allow for the ready transmission of the disease. Africa does not generally follow this practice, in part for reasons of culture and cost, and in part for reasons of lower life expectancy which thus establishes a smaller demographic cohort of elderly people.⁸ Covid-19 preys on those with pre-existing morbidities which tend to become more common with age. Thus far, this has favored Africa. But the virus is mutating and not only is it becoming more transmissible, it may in future become even more deadly.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Africa's life expectancy is 62 for men and 65 for women, Statista, "Average life expectancy in Africa for those born in 2020, by gender and region", <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274511/life-expectancy-in-africa/>. The respective figures for Europe are 75 and 82, Statista, "Average life expectancy in Europe for those born in 2020, by gender and region", <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274514/life-expectancy-in-europe>

While on the subject of demography, it is important to tackle a facile misperception that by affecting mainly the elderly, Covid-19 is not doing much harm to society. It is perhaps true that a disease such as polio which attacked children, seems emotionally more painful and damaging. But emotion is not a trustworthy means of gauging the impact of a disease. The better measure is to calculate the years lost by the untimely deaths caused by a certain disease.⁹ The life expectancy of older people is longer than the general life expectancy of the society because the latter figure incorporates those who died young. Those having survived to old age, can expect to live several years beyond general life expectancy. The lost years are not only lost to grandchildren who like having grandparents dote on them, but also lost to the economy as fewer consumers and producers. As of May 16, 2021, there have been 3,364,178 covid-19-related deaths.¹⁰ If we adopt, for illustrative purposes, the figure of 20 years lost per death, the total years lost is around 67 million.

Returning to the dress rehearsal argument, there is a bitter irony in the world's state of preparedness. Imperial Europe benefitted from exporting the diseases to which it had acquired immunity. The "Germs" in Diamond's book title refers to the various diseases that devastated the new world. Smallpox arrived around 1525, brought to Mexico apparently by a single sick Spaniard, it swept south and eliminated more than half the population of the Incan empire. Then came typhus in 1546, influenza and smallpox together in 1558, smallpox again in 1589, diphtheria in 1614, and measles in 1618, with the combined effect of reducing the native population by more than 90%.¹¹ Current events are not in this league of devastation. But the irony is that Asia and Africa, because they were prepared for pandemics, dealt with the initial onslaught of Covid-19 better than Europe. It was as if SARS and Ebola had acted as a form of inoculation. The irony is made bitter by the fact that the Americas, once again, were not inoculated. The Zika virus hit Brazil in 2015, but being a vector borne disease, it was all about the mosquito, not community transmission.

⁹ Kat Eschner, "A Revealing Metric: Measuring a Nation's Loss by the Years Covid Stole From Its Families", *New York Times*, April 25, 2021, p.6

¹⁰ World Health Organization, "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard", <https://covid19.who.int/>

¹¹ Watson, *op cit*, 542-544

Regime Type

As noted, this project began by distinguishing democratic from autocratic regimes. But this simple typology did not advance a plausible explanation for success or failure. Autocracies such as China, Cuba, Uganda and Vietnam performed well. But other autocracies such as Russia performed poorly. Some democracies such as Australia, Germany initially, and Taiwan were quite successful. But others such as Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States were far less successful. Several chapters and several commentators have noted the lack of a clear distinction in terms of successful practice between democracies and autocracies.¹²

Rank	Country	Score
	China	>90
3	Taiwan	84.8
	Vietnam	>80
9	Australia	76.8
13	Cuba	74.6
31	Uganda	58.8
55	Germany	46.1
74	UK	34.4
78	Russia	33.4
86	South Africa	26.8
96	USA	18.8
	Brazil	<5

Several chapters refer to the Lowy Institute's Covid Performance Index which asks the question: What impact have geography, political systems, population size, and economic development

¹² Tom Gerald Daly, *Democracy and the Global Pandemic: Reshuffled Reputations and the Future of the 'Free World'*, *VerfBlog*, 2021/5/01, <https://verfassungsblog.de/democracy-and-the-global-pandemic/>, DOI: [10.17176/20210501-111418-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20210501-111418-0)

had on COVID-19 outcomes around the world?¹³ The Index assigns scores and therefore rank to those countries for which it considers it has sufficient data as at mid-March 2021. Like all such number-based indexes, the numbers are derived from fact and opinion and thus draw their authority from the reputation of the compiler. Drawing from the index, the countries under review including China and the United States can be ranked as above.¹⁴

Other authors have also found the simple autocracy/democracy typology to be unrevealing and have attempted different ideas. Jasanoff and Hilgartner use a three-part typology to distinguish between cases in their sixteen-country study:

Three broad—and dramatically different—patterns emerged over the first year of the pandemic, connecting policies and outcomes across national health, economic, and political systems. Some countries achieved a coherent response and significant degree of *control* over the situation in all or most of the three arenas. Other countries achieved basic policy *consensus* about how to proceed, although trying to stall the epidemic entailed significant economic hardship. In still a third group of countries, policy *chaos* prevailed, with extensive conflict over policy goals and measures in all three systems.¹⁵

The control/consensus/chaos trilogy has the advantages of alliteration and simplicity. It is a useful mode of distinguishing between outcomes, but its weakness is that it is more descriptive than explanatory. And it begs some important questions. Of course, Covid-19 responses in communist systems in China, Cuba and Vietnam are in the consensus category because each personal choice is either to be part of the consensus or alternatively to be part of that country's version of the Gulag. The chaos category retains salience, and it would track with the final four countries on the modified Lowy list: Russia, South Africa, United States and Brazil.

¹³ Lowy Institute, "Covid Performance Index", <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/covid-performance/>

¹⁴ Insufficient recent data was available for several countries and so no rank was assigned at the time of the latest scoring, but scores in the table are drawn from previous performance.

¹⁵ Sheila Jasanoff, Stephen Hilgartner, *A Stress Test for Politics: Insights from the Comparative Covid Response Project (CompCoRe) 2020*, *VerfBlog*, 2021/5/11, <https://verfassungsblog.de/a-stress-test-for-politics-insights-from-the-comparative-covid-response-project-compcore-2020/>, DOI: [10.17176/20210511-091104-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20210511-091104-0).

A more explanatory typology can be found in Tom Daly's tracking of the impact of the pandemic on democratic decay:

1. Effective rationalists – suppressing the virus through rational fact-based policy, respecting maximal democratic functioning and the rule of law.
2. Constrained rationalists – adopting broadly rational and law-abiding approaches but hampered by limited state capacity.
3. Autocratic opportunists – capitalizing on the crisis to further consolidate their power.
4. Fantasists – governments simply refusing to accept the reality of the virus.¹⁶

Daly proposes New Zealand and South Korea as examples of effective rationalists, and Australia and Taiwan can confidently be added. Each of these countries had a government determined to obtain the best medical advice; had a rule of law system that would test possible governmental excesses; and had a population prepared to work together in support of the fact-based processes. Taiwan, which for a long period had no new cases, recently has had a flare up leading to several hundred new infections a day and requiring the government to prove its effective rationalist credentials anew.¹⁷ If there were holdouts in one of these countries, like some evangelicals in South Korea, they were effectively marginalized by the general response. The developments over the past four months would suggest that the Biden Administration can be counted in this category. But the weakness of the Daly typology is that it describes governmental responses, but not popular responses. Biden's America may have an effective rationalist government, but it has not yet escaped the chaos category.

An example of the constrained rationalist category provided by Daly is South Africa. Indeed, large swathes of the global South would fall in this category. The evidence for the constraint can be found in mortality and morbidity statistics, but an even starker indicator of constraint is the inability of governments in poor countries to vaccinate their people. More on

¹⁶ Daly *op cit*

¹⁷ Raymond Zhong and Amy Chang Chien, "Virus Flares Up Inside Taiwan's High Walls, Ending Year of Normality", *New York Times*, May 21, 2021, p.6

this below. Most of the European countries hover between the effective and the constrained forms of rationalism. That is because constraint can take various forms. It is less the lack of resources that constrain the wealthy countries but a lack of political consensus. And even when that largely exists, some powerful forces see the opportunity to behave as veto players.

Hungary's Viktor Orbán has become the poster boy for the autocratic opportunist category. He used the pandemic to gain near dictatorial powers.¹⁸ And among the set of countries under review, Uganda would probably fit in this category, though Susan Omwayo's chapter tends to give President Museveni the benefit of the doubt. The Human Rights Defenders Project has a different take:

During Uganda's election period, political opposition members and supporters, journalists, and activists were targeted. There was a spike in targeted attacks against human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition members. Electoral violence rose during party primaries. The election results were contested. Several journalists reporting on the election were arrested and beaten. As many as 430 political opposition supporters may have been abducted and some tortured. The government dispersed peaceful protests using excessive and unwarranted violence and arresting protestors. Ugandan citizens' rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association are increasingly under pressure.¹⁹

According to Amar Wason's chapter on Russia, Vladimir Putin can confidently be placed in the category of autocratic opportunist. While he had little interest and even less capacity to manage the virus, he was able to use the pandemic as a cover to persecute his political opponents and to improve electronic surveillance techniques. Cuba, China and Vietnam may be authoritarian but that did not stop them from also being effective rationalists. Yet the distinction only speaks to the constraints imposed by Russia's pseudo democratic structures. Putin used

¹⁸ Kim Lane Scheppele, *Orban's Emergency*, *VerfBlog*, 2020/3/29, <https://verfassungsblog.de/orbans-emergency/>, DOI: [10.17176/20200330-012828-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20200330-012828-0).

¹⁹ DefendDefenders, "ACHPR68: Updates from the East and Horn of Africa (October 2020-April 2021)", <https://defenddefenders.org/achpr67-updates-from-the-east-and-horn-of-africa-may-2020-november-2020-2/>

the pandemic as cover to further undermine them. Cuba, China and Vietnam, need no such cover, they pursue authoritarianism on a full-time basis.

The fourth category is called the fantasists. This is a category to which Americans have regrettably become all too familiar. Fighting a pandemic needs hard work, competent administration, coordination with other key actors, and consistent messaging. The Trump administration provided none of that and was happy to content itself with magical thinking (“it will just go away”), a cult of personality, and attacks on perceived enemies. And Trump was not alone. He had an acolyte in the form of Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro. Gabriela Casco’s chapter on Brazil pulls no punches in this regard, identifying the president as the central problem in Brazil’s unfolding tragedy.

Both typologies have thus been useful in categorizing the countries under review and understanding their responses to the pandemic. They fulfil an Aristotelian need for categorization. But each set has its limitations. The analysis needs to be complemented with several other factors: the problems of federalism, the complex issue of trust, and the politics of emergencies, each of which will be dealt with in turn.

Federalism

The pandemic is testing many systems, and among those most under pressure is federalism. Modern federalism contends with conflicting pressures. There is the gravitational pull of subsidiarity which holds that an issue needs to be dealt with at the lowest competent level of government. As states and local communities generally run hospitals, the weight of the pandemic fell largely on these levels of governance. The battle cry of “flatten the curve”, by which humans were asked to see themselves as data points on a graph, was an attempt to maintain the functionality of hospitals by preventing them from being overwhelmed by seriously ill Covid-19 patients. But there is also the inexorable pull of globalization which encompasses not only goods, services, and finance, but also humans. The world is, after all, a global village. National governments try to govern globalization through ad hoc processes, but the reality is that this method of governance is makeshift and spotty in its effectiveness. Global

health governance, in this instance represented by the World Health Organization, proved to be relevant but not as effective as required. The gravitational pull of subsidiarity lands issues in the in trays of state governments, while the inexorable pull of globalization places them in the hands of federal governments.

As Camilla Bober's chapter on Germany demonstrates, managing a pandemic through several levels of government is a challenge. Germany lived up to that challenge but not without a series of doubtful compromises. The federal government wanted a hard lockdown but the Länder insisted on a softer version. The federal government had the wealth and competence to prosecute an effective vaccination campaign, but the interests of the European Union (EU) dictated that the European Commission take charge of vaccine procurement, ultimately with less-than-optimal results. The Australian example was felicitous with the early establishment of a national cabinet including the Premiers (Governors) of all the states, which Abdelhamid notes in her chapter "would serve as a cohesive, data driven agency that would make decisions on pandemic response." There are sixteen Länder and six Australian states. These are good sizes for meetings and reaching decisions through personal contact among leaders. When an institution has more than 20 members, as with Russia's 21 republics, Brazil's 26 states, the EU's 27 members, and India's 29 states, it becomes more difficult to manage the decision-making process. When a nation has 50 states, the difficulty is exacerbated commensurately.

Alongside the quite positive examples of cooperative federalism in Australia and Germany, the countries under review include two examples of dysfunctional federalism in the form of Brazil and Russia, to which can be added the sorry example of the United States. In fact, it was the Trump Administration that set the tone that both leaders of Brazil and Russia would follow. For Trump, the pandemic was an annoying inconvenience with a negative impact on his prospects for reelection. It required committed and consistent long-haul policies of the type the Trump Administration proved itself incapable. Hence the magical thinking. But while Trump had no effective strategy for dealing with the pandemic, he had a cunning tactic – he would delegate responsibilities to the states and then blame them for failure. Perhaps the most egregious example was in Michigan where the Democratic Governor declared a lockdown

which Trump then tried to undermine by tweeting “LIBERATE MICHIGAN”. The chapters on Brazil and Russia demonstrate how Bolsonaro and Putin fell back to similar tactics.

At the time of writing, another federal nation is undergoing a Covid-19 crisis. India seemed to have weathered the storm through early lockdown policies which indeed flattened the curve. Even the initial lockdowns (they were extended several times) were not done in consultation with the states but as a form of diktat by the federal government with little notice given to the states to prepare for them.²⁰ But the early success was compromised because of the political ambitions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His Hindu nationalist credentials were on display when he permitted the Kumbh Mela festival to go ahead. In April 2021, three million people waded into the Ganges River thus constituting the biggest super spreader event on Earth. And he also gave the go ahead to campaigning for state elections, attracting huge crowds to political rallies across India. After the first wave had passed and Modi had declared victory, the B.1.167 variant, more transmissible and more deadly, arrived in the country and was abetted by the super spreader events.²¹ Modi has blunted the effectiveness of the other institutions of India from the legislature to the judiciary and he even bent the once revered and independent electoral commission to his will.²² Modi’s authoritarian tendency is weakening the delivery and oversight institutions, and thus weakening federalism.

The problems of federalism in Brazil, India, Russia, and the United States, as each country grappled with the pandemic, were caused by the national leader’s authoritarian disposition. Federalism is necessarily a democratic institution. It cannot exist in a non-democratic setting in which context it simply becomes a convenient top-down administrative mechanism.

²⁰ Thulasi K. Raj, *COVID-19 and the Crisis in Indian Democracy*, *VerfBlog* 2021/2/26, <https://verfassungsblog.de/covid-19-and-the-crisis-in-indian-democracy/>, DOI: [10.17176/20210226-154112-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20210226-154112-0).

²¹ Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj, “Covid Desperation Is Spreading Across India”, *New York Times*, May 11, 2021

²² K. S. Komireddi, *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*, Hurst and Co., London, 2019

Trust

Several chapters refer to the concept of trust. They argue that in polities that managed the pandemic competently, the people trusted their governments. The concept needs a little unpacking.

Political trust refers to citizens' assessments of the core institutions of the polity and entails a positive evaluation of the most relevant attributes that make each political institution trustworthy, such as credibility, fairness, competence, transparency in its policy-making, and openness to competing views.²³

As previously noted, there must be some doubt whether the concept of trust can be applied to the relationship between the citizenry and an authoritarian government. Of the factors listed in the Zmerli definition, only credibility and competence can readily apply to authoritarian settings. Fairness, transparency and openness are not qualities attributable to authoritarian regimes where the maintenance of the ruling party, junta or dynasty always remains the overriding objective. Thus, the success of China, Cuba or Vietnam should not be explained through the concept of trust but is closer to the concept of obedience. Because of a regime's previously demonstrated competence and credibility, that obedience may be wholehearted rather than grudging, but it is of a different quality than trust. Only democracies can be judged against the five attributes in the definition.

Of the countries under review, Australia, Germany and Taiwan rate well on the five attributes. Australians, people and government, trusted the experts. Angela Merkel's early honest appraisal of the reality of the pandemic, the opposite of magical thinking, set the tone for Germany's response. Taiwan activated its SARS-tested protocols with the support and cooperation of governments and governed alike. The three chapters on these countries relate stories of trust.

²³ S. Zmerli (2014) "Political Trust" Michalos A.C. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht, p.213. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2202

But the two countries where trust was most acutely demonstrated are New Zealand and South Korea. New Zealand, a country larger than Texas and Alaska combined, with a population of five million, suffered 25 deaths from Covid-19. Its strategy of a hard and early lockdown combined with a fortress New Zealand control of international entry points, worked well. Parliament functioned effectively throughout, passing the necessary laws and regulations while its Epidemic Response select committee served as an ongoing parliament-in-miniature.²⁴ The High Court heard challenges to the lockdown legislation and found for the government. “Accountability was not dodged or evaded in New Zealand. The government worked hard to render account about its actions; there remained many and varied opportunities for its response to be interrogated and judged.”²⁵

South Korea was the first domino to fall to the pandemic, but even after second and third waves of infection, the country has been able to keep new cases down to around ten a day. Unlike most other countries that successfully managed the pandemic, Korea did not employ a lockdown strategy. Instead, it used a difficult epidemiological approach that relies heavily on consent and cooperation of the public.²⁶ Cooperation, including through widely uploaded mobile telephone apps, is essential for gathering the travel history and contacts of confirmed patients. Cooperation is necessary for a strategy of performing diagnostic testing on anyone who came in contact with the infected. And a functioning public health system is essential for providing speedy treatment.

Thus far, trust has been used as a unidirectional concept – do the people trust the government? But an argument can be made that it also has relevance in the other direction. In one sense, the South Korean example is of a government that trusts its people to cooperate and thus need only request rather than require. It has worked well in Korea and, given the near

²⁴ Knight, Dean R: *New Zealand: Rendering Account During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, *VerfBlog*, 2021/4/19, <https://verfassungsblog.de/new-zealand-rendering-account-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>, DOI: [10.17176/20210419-101145-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20210419-101145-0)

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ Seokmin Lee, Tae-Ho Kim, *South Korea's Combating COVID-19 Under the Rule of Law*, *VerfBlog*, 2021/4/08, <https://verfassungsblog.de/south-koreas-combating-covid-19-under-the-rule-of-law/>, DOI: [10.17176/20210408-172700-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20210408-172700-0)

universal public acceptance of vaccines, the nation can expect to see a Covid-19-free existence in the not-too-distant future. Sweden is another country where the government trusted the people. Perhaps it did so out of necessity because its powers, even in relation to a pandemic, are limited. Where the Swedish government has the power, it acted – by closing universities and high schools and by limiting gatherings initially to 500 people and soon thereafter to 50.²⁷ But in most other situations, the government issued recommendations and trusted the people to abide by them. The result has been less than exemplary:

As of April 16, 2021, more than 13 700 people have died from COVID-19 in Sweden. The country has one of the highest infection rates in western Europe according to Our World in Data COVID-19 statistics, with 606 new infections per million per day, while its neighbours Denmark, Finland, and Norway reported 115, 62, and 112 new infections per million per day, respectively (April 15, 2021).²⁸

Relying on the public to follow mere recommendations in a pandemic is an audacious strategy. It worked in Korea where the government was confident outlier dissidents, such as some evangelical churches, could be marginalized and contained. It did not work in Sweden, and no other European nation attempted this course of action. This is not the appropriate publication to attempt cultural or historical explanations for the different results. But a narrow conclusion might be that trust in government is essential, and government's need to translate that trust into effective directions and counter-measures. These generally need the backing of law and law enforcement to be effective.

Emergencies

Arsanious Hanna's chapter on the United Kingdom begins with a quote: "many of the most grave and systematic human rights abuses occur during public emergencies, when states employ extraordinary powers to address threats to the public". Hanna accuses the British

²⁷ Iain Cameron, Anna Jonsson-Cornell, *Sweden and COVID 19: A Constitutional Perspective*, *VerfBlog*, 2020/5/07, <https://verfassungsblog.de/sweden-and-covid-19-a-constitutional-perspective/>, DOI: [10.17176/20200507-133715-0](https://doi.org/10.17176/20200507-133715-0).

²⁸ Mariam Claeson and Stefan Hanson, "The Swedish COVID-19 strategy revisited", *The Lancet*, April 19, 2021, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00885-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00885-0)

government of decaying democracy, mainly by delaying local elections, through the use of emergency powers. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, in its *Constitution-Building Primers*, agrees that:

many governments have used emergency powers inappropriately – needlessly prolonging or renewing states of emergency, and using emergency powers not to restore democratic normality but to bypass normal channels of democratic accountability, harass dissidents, rig elections, restrict the press, and ultimately to set aside a nominally democratic constitution and impose a dictatorial regime.²⁹

But the primer goes on to note that epidemics are a valid trigger for emergency powers and that delaying elections, even for one year, is a common and accepted response to an emergency.

Other chapters provide examples of the abuse of emergency powers. In Russia, Putin has used it to extend and perfect electronic surveillance of the public. In Uganda, Museveni used the social distancing rules to sabotage the electoral campaigns of his political opponents. In Brazil, Bolsonaro drew on his powers to sack anybody who disagreed with his economy first approach. Best practice on emergency powers can be found in the International Law Association's 1984 Paris Minimum Standards of Human Rights Norms in a State of Emergency which provide that:

The courts should have the power and jurisdiction to decide:

1. Whether emergency legislation is in violation of the constitution: do the material conditions specified for this state of exception exist? Does the situation meet the constitution's requirement of necessity, meaning that the exercise of emergency powers is strictly necessary to meet the demands of the situation?
2. Whether any particular exercise of power is in violation of the emergency provisions: have all the required procedures been followed? Has the use of emergency powers met the requirements of necessity and proportionality?

²⁹ Elliot Bulmer, "Emergency Powers: International IDEA Constitution-Building Primer 18", p. 7, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/emergency-powers-primer.pdf>

3. Whether there is a breach of constitutional provisions protecting rights and freedoms even under a state of emergency. Have non-derogable rights been violated?
4. Whether specific measures violating rights that allow derogation are proportional.
5. Whether emergency measures are in violation of local laws, which are to be regarded as remaining in effect unless explicitly repealed.³⁰

It is interesting that one of the countries most at risk, given its proximity to and people-to-people contact with China, South Korea, resisted the temptation to declare an emergency.³¹ As noted above, the government relied on existing laws and banked on public cooperation. The government of the Republic of Korea is left of center, and it was acutely conscious of Korea's authoritarian history of military dictatorships. A declaration of emergency powers is available under the Korean constitution, but the government chose not to resort to it as yet another signal that Korea has broken free of its authoritarian past.

Vaccines

When this project was initially conceived, vaccines were a vague future hope. At the time of writing of the chapters, vaccines had emerged as a critical issue. By May 2021, a new lexicon had emerged: vaccine nationalism, vaccine diplomacy, Covax. The underlying question is whether vaccination could be quarantined from politics. The clear answer is in the negative.

Javier Nino's chapter on Cuba points to the way the government used the development of its Covid-19 vaccine, Soberna (Sovereignty), as a means to build legitimacy and foster nationalism. The chapter on Vietnam refers to Nanocovax, a recombinant protein vaccine made using animal cells, that was developed by a startup called Nanogen Pharmaceutical Biotechnology in collaboration with Vietnam Military Medical University, as an achievement worthy of national pride. Russia has gloried in its speedy development of the Sputnik vaccine, as that chapter makes clear. And China was also quick to develop its Sinopharm vaccine which recently gained approval for global use from the WHO, though it has been administered in

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.23

³¹ Seokmin Lee and Tae-Ho Kim, *op cit*

China and elsewhere for many months.³² Most countries were ready to accept vaccine approvals from domestic agencies rather than await the WHO process. This panoply of vaccines is in addition to the suite developed in the global North by Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna.

The impact of politics on vaccine distribution and access has been seen at the national, regional, and international levels. Domestically, the most egregious example is in the United States, where mask use and vaccine acceptance were irresponsibly injected in the nation's political and cultural polarization. Not only does this manifest in different rates of vaccination with broad acceptance in blue states and hesitancy in red states, but also in state laws. In Florida, the governor signed into law a bill that makes it illegal for businesses to require proof of vaccination.³³ The rationale is libertarian, but the effect will be anti-vaxxer. Why should this libertarian rationale not apply equally to mandatory vaccines against childhood diseases? According to this approach, why should governments and not parents make this decision. In this regard, the counterpart of Governor DeSantis is the Islamist rabble rouser in northern Nigeria or the tribal areas of Pakistan peddling a conspiracy theory that polio vaccinations will cause infertility. The end result of this libertarian overreach will be the return of measles to claim the lives of children in America, and, one day the return of polio to cripple those children, brought in by an unwitting visitor from Nigeria or Pakistan.

At the regional level, politics played out in the European Union's assertion of responsibility for vaccine procurement for the entire bloc. This episode pointed to the best and the worst of the European experiment. At its best, it was a remarkable example of self-abnegation on the part of the wealthy nations of the EU, refusing to use their power to ensure a deal for their nationals more favorable than that which poorer EU members could offer their people. At its worst, it demonstrated the weakness of decision-making and negotiation by

³² BBC, "Sinopharm: Chinese Covid vaccine gets WHO emergency approval." 7 May 2021.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56967973>

³³ Government of Florida news release, "Governor Ron DeSantis Signs Landmark Legislation to Ban Vaccine Passports and Stem Government Overreach", May 3, 2021, <https://www.flgov.com/2021/05/03/governor-ron-desantis-signs-landmark-legislation-to-ban-vaccine-passports-and-stem-government-overreach/>

committee. As Paul Krugman noted,³⁴ the EU committee approach was inherently risk adverse, haggling with big pharma and playing hard-to-get so as to obtain the best financial deal possible and thus avoid criticism of financial profligacy from the 27 members. The result was that Big Pharma prioritized access for those willing to pay top dollar. Unlike the Commission, governments, facing the wrath of voters, spent like drunken sailors to ensure access to vaccines. The EU nations therefore will all go at the same (slow) speed. One of the most galling aspects of this European fiasco was the ammunition it provided the British government to claim that Brexit was justified because British arms were being injected with vaccines far faster than would have been the case had the UK stayed in the EU.

At the international level, the issue, manifesting itself in various ways, was access to vaccines by poor countries. One manifestation was vaccine diplomacy, whereby China, Russia, Cuba and others sought to win friends and influence governments by giving priority access to various countries. India, a major vaccine manufacturer also followed this path but had to end it abruptly after it became clear that the vaccines were needed urgently at home.³⁵ The Cuba chapter makes clear that the Cuban vaccine will be prioritized for Cuba's Bolivarian allies in the region to strengthen solidarity between them. The underlying message of Chinese and Russian diplomacy was about their generosity in comparison with the West's selfishness. This rather backfired on Russia as Amar Wason's chapter notes, when Russia was accused of providing a different vaccine than that ordered by Slovakia.³⁶

It is estimated that eleven billion doses are required to vaccinate 70% of the world's population – this is based on two doses being given per person, and fewer doses may be required if the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine is preferred. That level of vaccination may achieve population-level, or herd, immunity.³⁷ Given the value placed on freedom of movement

³⁴ Paul Krugman, "A Fiasco That's Very European: Vaccines", *New York Times*, March 19, 2021,

³⁵ Shruti Menon, "India coronavirus: Vaccine makers are prioritising local needs", *BBC News*, 20 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55571793>

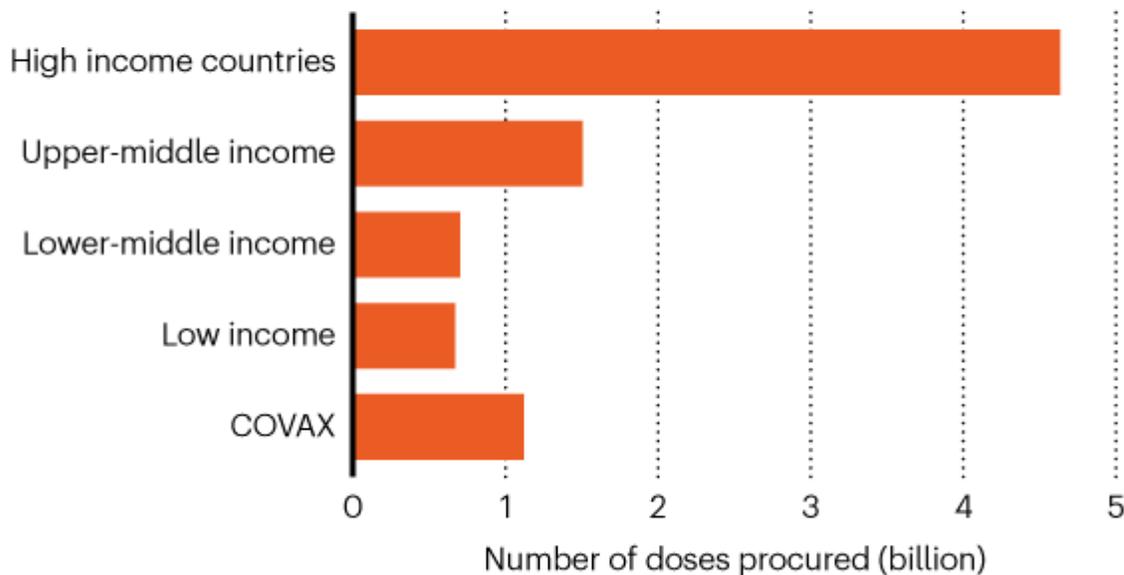
³⁶ Andrew Higgins, "Slovakia Claims Bait-and-Switch With the Russian Vaccine It Ordered", *New York Times*, April 9, 2021, p.8

³⁷ Aisling Irwin, "What it will take to vaccinate the world against COVID-19", *Nature*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00727-3>

around the world, on which entire industries such as tourism are based, the goal needs to be global herd immunity.

A TALE OF VACCINE INEQUALITY

High- and upper-middle-income countries have secured more than 6 billion out of 8.6 billion vaccine doses.



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*Data from 19 March 2021.

But as the graph³⁸ above demonstrates, the vast majority of vaccines, at this early stage at least, are going to the wealthy countries. Two solutions have been proposed to redress this imbalance. The first carries the name of Covax, which is a global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to Covid-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. Covax is co-led by the Oslo-based Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) spearheaded by the Gates Foundation, and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF. Its aim is to accelerate the development and manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.³⁹ Governments around the world pledge money or vaccines to Covax. It is a laudable initiative, but it has not yet had the desired impact with

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ GAVI, "What is Covax?", <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility?>

only about 12% of global vaccine production available for distribution by Covax. As the wealthy countries reach deep levels of vaccination, it can be expected that they will become more generous and, accordingly, Covax will become more effective.

The other proposed solution to the access and distribution problem is to waive the vaccine patents to allow more manufacturers to produce the various vaccines. The Biden Administration surprisingly joined more than 100 nations asking the World Trade Organization to partially set aside vaccine patents.⁴⁰ But this looks like a magic bullet solution aimed at bolstering political support rather than solving the vaccination problem. Access to the patent would not translate into a massive increase in vaccine supply. Vaccine production can require more than 200 individual components, which are often manufactured in different countries – these include glass vials, filters, resin, tubing and disposable bags.⁴¹ It also requires a large number of skilled technicians, pharmacists, and engineers. A vaccine patent cannot be compared to a recipe for chocolate cake. There may well be an argument for open access to, as opposed to protection of, intellectual property, but that argument needs to be debated on its merits, not as a breathless emergency response to temporary vaccine shortages.

Any Lessons to be Learned?

A reference was made in class to the role of pandemics in world history. Scheidel⁴² ranks pandemics as one of the great levelers in society, so would the Covid-19 pandemic have that impact? The great plague in the European Middle Ages killed so many people that the laws of supply and demand forced landowners to pay handsomely for farm labor, a factor that would ultimately have a transformative effect over society. That is not happening in relation to Covid-19. Its impact thus far has been to reinforce and widen inequality. The reason Covid-19 is not like the plague, is because humanity now has the knowledge and skills to deal with it. The cause of the disease was identified, and its genome mapped and made public within days of the

⁴⁰ Peter Goodman, Apoorva Mandavilli, Rebecca Robbins, Martina Stevis-Gridneff, “The Herculean Struggle to Vaccinate the World”, *New York Times*, May 16, 2021, p.1, 10.

⁴¹ Irwin, *op cit*

⁴² Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, 2017

outbreak. It only took one year for effective vaccines to be developed. Much of the economy continued to tick over digitally. Supply lines were buffeted but not broken. The one-week blockage of the Suez Canal probably did more harm to world trade than did the pandemic. Stock markets remained optimistic even though the nosedive of the retail industry accelerated. And wealthy governments pumped relief money direct to households to tide them over. No, Covid-19 is not a Scheidel leveler, its negative impacts were largely mitigated.

Covid-19 was, however, a test of governance. It tested all types of governments, whether democratic or autocratic. And, one modest conclusion that can be drawn from this limited study, is that regime type was not the critical variable in success or failure. The broad governance distinction of greatest relevance was between competence and incompetence. There was the competence of the governments that based their responses on scientific expertise, and there was the incompetence of governments that based their responses on fantasy and magical thinking. A component of competence is the capacity to prioritize. Competent governments understood that the pandemic had to be given top priority and that the costs of lockdowns and relief checks were necessary. Incompetent governments wished to give priority to the economy, misunderstanding that the economy could not function properly while the pandemic raged. Competent governments also made vaccine development and production a national priority. Incompetent governments preferred to rely on a vague notion of herd immunity, the impact and extent of which can only be discerned long after the event. It is not difficult to allocate the ten governments under review to the two categories. On the Lowy list, the cut-off would be around the 50 score.

Competence is susceptible to ascertainment and even measurement. The other critical variable, trust, is more difficult to discern. This chapter has already made the distinction between voluntary trust and rational compliance, while acknowledging that the compliance insisted on in authoritarian countries may nevertheless be wholeheartedly granted by the people because of a perception of the government's performance legitimacy. Both voluntary trust and rational compliance had the same impact of making policy decisions more effective because they were translated into action on the ground. There might come a time when what is being asked

of the people in an emergency goes beyond the limits of mere compliance and can only be accomplished by genuine trust. But Covid-19 did not press this button. Covid-19 did, however, demonstrate the ineffectiveness of government policy when met by a lack of trust or compliance. There were patches of this around the world but nowhere was it starker than in the United States where notions of unfettered individualism combined with a broadly-held concept of government as a necessary evil, condemned rational preventive steps like masks, social distancing and vaccines, to slide into the maw of partisan polarization. Most nations could overcome their partisan divides in service to building trust in prevention policies. The US could not.

Trust is not an instinct; it is a quality built over time. The main ingredient is honesty. Honesty cannot give priority to immediate needs. When masks were in short supply, many government experts said they were not necessary. Once they became widely available, they were labeled as essential and made mandatory. This is not a trust building formula. Honesty might take the form of delivering bad news as when Angela Merkel told the German nation that many of them would fall ill. Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand emphatically won a national election because she was able to speak empathetically to her countryfolk over tragedies such as the Christchurch Mosque shootings and the pandemic. Tsai Ing-Wen of Taiwan has been straight forward but nevertheless calming in her comments about both the relationship with China and managing the pandemic. On the other hand, men such as Bolsonaro, Putin and Trump, have strutted their macho personas, preferring to attack their enemies rather than the disease. Can we conclude that women leaders are better in emergency situations?

The argument made in a previous publication by the author⁴³ is relevant to this question. No, it is not possible to draw a gender conclusion about men or women leaders based on the actions of a small sample. But perhaps a conclusion can be drawn about method and style of leadership. There is a male leadership style of decisiveness, assertiveness and self-confidence. There is a female leadership style of caring, nurturing and empathy. This author argued that good leadership requires a blend of both styles, and that leadership should not be conceived in

⁴³ Roland Rich, *Democracy in Crisis: Why, Where, How to Respond?* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Co., 2017

gender terms or even genderless terms, but in bi-gender terms. Women leaders have been better able than men to incorporate both styles of leadership. The previous publication therefore recommended the need for the feminization of politics; for male leaders to learn to adopt aspects of the female style.

The introductory chapter described Covid-19 as a black swan, a hard-to-predict and rare event. It behaved that way for some governments, but other governments had been through the SARS dress rehearsal and knew how to respond. New zoonotic diseases should not be considered to be black swans. Darwinian mutation dictates that variants will emerge and cross the human threshold. If there is one lesson that needs to be learned it is that humanity needs to be better prepared for the next disease, the next pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates the weakness of global governance. The world responded in messy Westphalian ways. There was a clear need for an effective global health governance institution. The World Health Organization proved to be a creature at the beck-and-call of governments, lacking the independence necessary to make it an effective actor. It performed as well as could be expected in the circumstances but by the time the next pandemic hits, the world needs to have in place a far more effective global health leader.

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